MEET THE HEROES

JAG PARVESH CHANDER

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Dedicated to my heroine

ARUNA ASAF ALI

Printed by S. Harkishan Singh B.A., LL.B., at the Asha Art Press,
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To

★ SHAH NAWAZ...

★★ DHILLON...

★★★ PREM SEGHAL...

With song on lip and joy in heart
Like arid earth awaiting rain
We welcome you. May symbols great
Divine and chaste over us reign.

The shadows of the firing squad
Loomed grim and dark upon your face—
You did not flag but stood upright
To take stark death in your embrace.

You are not men as we all are
But shining stars of India's fight . . .
With dazzled eyes I look at you
And kneel before our Freedom's Light.

JAG PARVESH CHANDER

Reproduced from *The Leader* Allahabad.

CHAPTER I

OFF ON OUR JOURNEY

Manmohan met me at the *Volga* on Jan. 9. As I stepped towards him and lengthened my arm for a hand-shake, I had a minor shock. His handsome face which is invariably wreathed with smiles was now morose. The merriness which glistens on his ruddy cheeks had disappeared. I concluded that a certain sad memory was casting its grim shadows on his face.

He just pushed out his hand and gave me a timid hand-shake. I glowered at him and falteringly muttered, "What is the matter? Why are you out of spirits?"

He unclutched his hand from mine and gently rested it on my shoulder and started speaking in a timorous voice. "You know (his favourite phrase whether he himself knows it or not) the other day I witnessed the most touching scene of my life. Its memory still haunts me. Every time I lift my eyes and look around, the scene drifts from the direction in which my eyes are set. The scene does not fade away, but plants itself before me with a bang."

He cleared his throat with a sharp, quick cough and resumed speaking in a low bass voice. Needless to say, the inevitable "you know" was flung into my face. I accepted it with grace as I was maddeningly keen to know the origin and reality of this scene.

He paused for a while. Perhaps he was at a loss to find the best way to narrate what he had seen. I held my breath lest the faintest swish should disturb him, and

I just stood like a statute waiting for his lips to flutter and produce words. I noticed the dry parched lips parting and this time they kept on opening and closing, like the little wings of a butterfly caged by a truant in a box.

" The other day I went to R.B. Badri Das's house. You know, Shah Nawaz, Dhillon and Seghal had gone there to meet Sarat Bose. As Shah Nawaz clenched Sarat Bose in a tight embrace, tears rolled down the cheeks of Shah Nawaz. They held each other in an embrace so closely and for so long that it seemed as if the two men had merged into one. As I glanced around I noticed that those who had cordoned them had wet eyes too. The whole scene moved me so much that in spite of the tightening of my lips and giving a little jerk to my neck, I could not control the waves of emotion that were surging in my chest. I elbowed my way out and permitted my eyes to express the intensity of their feelings. And, you know, for more than five minutes I sobbed and wept . . . wept and sobbed."

Wept for five minutes ! Have you ever wept for five minutes ? Five minutes in terms of time do not sound much. But five minutes are infinitely longer than you imagine when you weep. Try it if you disbelieve me. I know it from experience. I am not ashamed to admit that I have wept many a time. But I must not digress. These are personal matters, and I would say even sacred, because tears wash away the sorrows of the soul as soap cleans the dirt off one's face.

" Yes, I appreciate the feelings of Sarat and Shah Nawaz. When they looked into each other's eyes all

the memories of Subash crystalized themselves before them," I said in a quivering and hesitant note.

Suddenly I noticed a flash in his eyes. I could see that a chink of an idea had darted into his luminous eyes.

"Now, look, (another favourite phrase of his) how about writing a book about the I.N.A. Heroes," he said in a clear voice.

I was so much hypnotised by the words BOOK and HEROES that I literally yelled, "Done."

The reason is simple.

I love writing books as much as I love eating good food. And when a Punjabi says good food he means every morsel of it.

Secondly, the word Heroes electrifies me as much as the word sweetheart wafts me into ecstasies.

Now do not take my words lightly. When a lonely young man like me brackets the words hero with sweetheart he means it and is not being flippant. Having none whom I can admire and worship, I satisfy my instinct of adoration by singing the songs of my national heroes.

I am sorry if I have bored you by being personal. I know you are itching to meet the heroes and so am I. Let us hurry up. Come and sit in my faithful little rickety Austin. You shall have to pull the choke, while I crank.

With a "half handle" the engine starts purring. And we are off to No. 2 Golf Road—the house of The Hon'ble Justice Achru Ram.

II

As I dab the accelerator and let the engine rip, the reader shrieks like a bird wounded by an arrow, " For heaven's sake drive slowly."

" Come on, don't be limey. Have a cigarette and light me one," I replied with complete detachment.

The car cut its way through the lazy stream of traffic like a motor boat. Suddenly the reader's face grew wan and plaintively he admonished me to apply the brakes as the traffic constable had raised his right hand against me.

" But I have no brakes," I drawled into his ears.

" What n...o...o ?" he shouted and put his hands before his eyes as if like the fabulous three monkeys he wanted to see no evil. As soon as the policeman saw my car nearing him, with a sharp smart click of his heels, he changed the direction of the traffic and I whisked past him.

But the reader had his hands plastered over his eyes. He just parted his two middle fingers and peered through the little space. To his utter amazement he found himself safe. His jaw had not been fractured, nor was his head bleeding.

" How did you manage?" he gasped.

" Simple, my dear Watson. As soon as a policeman hears the loud snorting of my car, he instantaneously changes the direction of the traffic because he knows that I have no brakes to stop the car. He values his life more than the propriety of this puerile courtesy— first come first served," I replied.

" But . . . . "

" There are no buts," I cut him short. " In life if one starts worrying about these buts one would be lost in a thick jungle of pessimism. And these ifs are but the amusements of cynics who euphemistically extol themselves as calculating persons. In this world there is only one way of doing a thing and that is *to do* it. When you start from the marching post, march along. That the end of the uphill journey may be a green flat valley of hope and joy or a musty dungeon of despair and disappointment is besides the point."

After hearing these words of wisdom (or grotesque nonsense) the reader sat bolt upright. He slapped his thighs and triumphantly said, " I too have been a daredevil in my days."

" That is wonderful. It is a treat to have a companion like you in our mission to meet the heroes. We do not know how and where we shall meet them and your company will be most helpful in our unchartered expedition," I replied.

III

As the car rolled on the road girdling the exquisitely beautiful Lawrence Garden, I retarded its speed.

" Why this sobriety?" asked the reader.

" Look at the garden . . . the trees and the effects of the winter on them. Don't you hear the leaves whispering among themselves : 'Let us celebrate the last few days of our earthly existence for tomorrow we fall down and die . . . and shall be buried in a pit by the gardener to turn us into manure.'

" Then listen to the winds which are blowing rather dolefully because they don't want to blow in a frenzy lest they should hasten the shame and sable shabbiness of the trees by tearing away the garment of leaves which covers their nakedness," I said in rather moaning tones.

I turned the car into the garden to bid farewell to the leaves which were clinging to the branches between life and death. On the russet lawns I found a confetti carnival of leaves. Things of nature even when they are dead struggle their utmost not to relinquish their former dignity.

In the dry curved leaves that were littered on the sad dry lawns, (for the winter frost had killed their greenness) I found more life than I see in the whole lot of *Lalas* who squat cross-legged in the shops of Dabi Bazar as if they had attained *Nirvana.*

I would rather " talk " to the dead petals of flowers lying scattered on my table than discuss the future of Hinduism with these shameless symbols of my religion . . .the religion of Lord Krishna . . . the religion of Ram and Sita.

May the radio-active waves still lingering in the city of Hiroshima come to Lahore and pierce through their oppulent bellies full of black-market flesh !

JAI HIND



Prem Sehgal

Chapter II.

MEET PREM SEGHAL

A *chaprasi* clad in cherry-coloured uniform, with a broad belt of gold around his waist, obsequously bowed and greeted me with Jai Hind.

Frankly speaking this salutation came as a shock to *me*. I could very well imagine the whole house of Prem Seghal echoing and re-echoing with the slogan of Jai Hind. It would not have surprised me if I had seen the compound bristling with the signposts of Jai Hind. And further I would have taken it for granted if the road was plastered with tiny placards of Jai Hind.

But a High Court *chaprasi* greeting me with Jai Hind was beyond my imagination. For a moment I felt convinced that the Wheels of Revolution had started moving and now it was for the leaders to generate speed into the giant invisible Wheels.

Unknowingly I lowered my head towards the *chaprasi* and joyously said, Jai Hind. As I intently looked at him, a beaming smile flashed across his face.

I pencilled my name on a piece of paper and asked him to give it to Prem Seghal. But I was told that he had gone to attend some function given in his honour.

You will agree that it is no good waiting for him, for luck alone knows when he would turn up. Before we part company let us have a cup of tea at *Lorangs*.

II

As I climbed the steps of the restaurant I found three young bright girls and a pleasant middle-

aged man impatiently waiting for their guest. There was so much enthusiasm bubbling in the eyes of these girls that I was at a loss to guess who this lucky guest could be. The wicker basket was full of festoons, daintly strung with the choicest flowers.

My instinct told me that perhaps they were waiting for Seghal.

I took a bearer to one side and gently asked him for whom these girls were waiting. Promptly he replied, "The Jai Hind Seghal."

I waded through the gibbering crowd near the counter and went into the main hall. I threw myself into a chair and ordered tea.

The restaurant was crowded and the babble was agonising. Scream, chatter, yell, screech, howl, shout, bellow, bang, smash. One would have said that somebody had entered the monkey house at the zoo, armed with a red hot poker which he was applying to the monkeys' posteriors. But no. In one corner the ladies of Lahore were only indulging in a little polite conversation; in another corner the young Muslim Leaguers were just discussing the Rise and Fall of the Congress and in the middle of the room were the Communists dialectically analysing in an astute scientific way the number of seats they would capture in the Punjab Assembly.

The combined noise of the three groups was so deafening that they could lower the walls of Government House. I felt convinced that if Lahore ever falls, it will not fall because of any earthquake or battle, but because somebody gives a tea party to the whole lot of society women, Muslim Leaguers and Communists.

I hurriedly gulped down my tea and lit a cigarette. I pondered rather wistfully over the propriety of asking the girls whether I could join their tea party.

Since you and I are both dare-devils and are determined to meet the heroes, such middle class formalities of gate-crashing do not exist for us. You had better finish your tea and regale yourself with the chocolate biscuits and I shall dash to the girls standing in the verandah.

I introduced myself to a girl who was tip-toeing like a little girl waiting for her father to hand over the doll to her. Every second that passed seemed to lie heavily on her mind like a night that would never end. I told her that I wanted to meet Seghal as I was writing a book about the heroes. For a second I felt nervous, fearing that I was intruding.

" Oh yes, you are welcome. It would be a pleasure to have you among us, " she said in a sweet, musical voice.

" It will be an honour to be with you," I replied with bowed head.

I don't like saying *Namaste*—the half-dead *Mahasha* habit. If you respect a person, why not bow before him or her or shake hands? I say *Namaste* to those whom I do not want to see again. For *me* it is an equivalent of : Let us part as friends.

As the tea party is arranged upstairs, let us go up and occupy our seats.

III

I found two lads in their teens lounging in a sofa. As there was no one present in the room, we introduced ourselves to one another.

And now let me introduce them to you. This young boy with the big round spectacles is Satya Prakash and the fair looking one is Attar Mohd. They are from the batch of forty-five cadets who had volunteered themselves for training in Tokyo.

Hardly had I sat for five minutes, when I heard the staircase rustling with the noise of quick footsteps. Miss A darted towards us and gasping for breath stammered, " He has come."

We all stood up in rapt attention, with our inquisitive eyes fixed on the gate.

Now please muster a little more patience. Prem will soon be with us.

A roar of footsteps started rising up from the bottom of the staircase. As every second passed it grew louder and still louder. My heart started beating faster and faster and I am sure your heart must be clapping your ribs.

A tall, handsome and robust man in the bloom of youth appeared before us.

The first thing that struck me was that he looked very clean. Immaculate. Not that I had expected to find him dirty. But there was something about the lily-white shirt, the gleaming handkerchief, the beautifully pressed trousers, the smooth flow of his necktie, the glistening polish of his shoes, that suggested he had dressed in a disinfected room with the assistance of a highly efficient valet, who had put on his clothes with pincers.

In a deep sonorous voice we shouted Jai Hind.

The three girls who surrounded him were joy personified. To them it was a rare day of triumph . . . a day of exhileration . . . a day of pride. Their feelings were perfectly human and their exuberance spontaneous and justified.

Prem Seghal, the idol of millions was with them . . . Prem Seghal, the hero of the Indian National Army was chatting to them with refreshing informality . . . Prem Seghal, the symbol of sacrifice was going to have tea with them . . . with them.

IV

The most tell-tale thing about a woman is her mouth and the most tell-tale thing about a man is his voice. No amount of cosmetic can turn mean lips into kind ones, and no amount of histrionic talent can give the ring of sincerity to the voice of a man who does not believe what he is saying.

I have mentioned these two things specially because they have a bearing on this meeting.

Here sits before me a man who says in a clear round voice every word that is sincere and in whose efficacy he reposes complete faith. And faith is the only word that can describe the passion with which he speaks.

And further the three girls who sat next to him were among the most charming girls I have ever met. There was not a speck of make up on their clean sweet faces. There was nothing of the scorching lip-stick on their soft lips. Their smooth curving lips were pink. And pink and not the blazoning red is the natural colour of the lips. And if a person is natural he or she *is* sincere.

I was so much impressed by these three girls that my

pen moves itself to describe them. I feel that I should write in coloured inks, that golden asterisks should flicker between the words. I feel like dragging up a fistful of hot and splendid adjectives and hurl them sparkling across this page. I feel like writing in movie prose.

But how can I ?

The only simile to depict their personality that dances before my eyes is that of the day itself. So let me draw luxuriantly on it.

Miss A struck me as the dawn,placid calm, refreshing and a little shy. You might say : is the dawn shy ? Well. if you have the courage to get up in the small hours of the morning, go into the open fields and you will not only realise but feel that the dawn is covered by a thin silken veil of shyness. As regards the other three hypnotising qualities of the dawn you agree with me, so there is no need to pursue them further.

Miss B struck me as the noon, dazzling, active, bouyant and open. Just as the light of the sun permeates into every corner, her luminous personality pervaded us all.

Miss C struck me as the evening, a little swarthy, meditative, retiring and soothing. You seem to be a bit puzzled as to whether the last three characteristics are a part of evening itself or not. Go out for a stroll instead of lingering in the restaurant and you will detect all these qualities in the personality of evening.

There is another reason for depicting the characteristics of these girls because in the little lively drama that was being enacted before me, these girls played their

respective parts according to the individual traits of their character.

V

Prem Seghal, as you know, since his release from the Red Fort, has been addressing meeting after meeting. His throat has lost its sharpness and his voice has become hoarse. He is so clean in his physique and neat in manners that the husky voice sounded simply grotesque. It had the same irritating effect as thick and protruding lips would have on a woman whose features were chiselled by nature with great care and precision.

" The first thing that the public should do is to organise a Society for the Protection of Cruelty to the I.N.A. Personnel. People here are so affectionate that they literally kill you with their affection. Look at my diary. It is studded with dates and hours," he groaned in touching tones.

Miss Evening rather pathetically addressed Prem thus "I bought a diary on New Year's day, but it is as blank as a slate washed by sponge and water. Nobody invites me."

"Don't worry," retorted Seghal "When I was a college student, the same thing happened with me. All I could scribble in the yawning pages of my diary was the number of periods that I missed."

We all burst out into loud guffaws. But Seghal himself could not join us. The very idea of laughter was repugnant to his lungs caked with dust. At best and at worst, they could cough. And, while we all laughed at his dry sense of humour, the man who made us laugh kept on coughing and coughing . . .

IN INDIA ONE CAN SAFELY SAY THAT DUST LIES IN THE LUNGS OF THOSE THAT WEAR THE CROWN.

Miss Noon being a woman of action asked Prem to explain the exploits of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment.

The voice of Prem shot high and he said, "I must tell you with all the emphasis at my command that the Rani of Jhansi Regiment was a fighting unit. I have heard some unfair critics indulging in all sorts of platitudes that this regiment was merely formed for propaganda purposes. With due deference to their intelligence, I am forced to assert that I know better than they. These brave women came from all classes, rich and poor. Some of them were little girls in their teens and some of them were the mothers of half a dozen children. To them the cause of Netaji was far nobler than the welfare and future of their children.

"Once an elderly Punjabi woman came to me and told me that she had been trying to explain to her husband the mission of Netaji. But her words just fell flat on his ears like the drops of rain on stone.

" As she was a decrepit old woman, I dissuaded her from joining the regiment as the work was strenuous, and hardships plenty. But she simply would not listen to my arguments. And believe it or not, next day she presented herself before me, with a rifle proudly tucked under her arm.

" These brave women were given regular military training and lessons in all the methods of modern warfare."

Now Miss Evening (for she is meditative and calculating) asked Prem what effect it would have had on the Indian soldiers if they were pitched in a battle against the women of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment.

Prem smilingly looked at her and said, " How could Indian soldiers fight against their own sisters, mothers and daughters?"

Miss Dawn calmly lifted herself from the sofa and poured tea for everybody. Prem wanted to say something, but Miss Noon openly in a sweet sisterly manner snubbed him thus: " You must sip your tea while it is hot. It is good for your throat and will drive away every feeling of tiredness."

Needless to say, Prem obeyed her, for who can stand the dazzle of the midday sun ?

I had a double dose of tea and since there is no likelihood of my meeting the hosts, I thank them through these written words.

VI

A blanket of silence dragged itself over us for a few minutes and I threw it away by asking Prem how and by whom the honorific title of Netaji was given to Subash.

" Perhaps you know very well that Netaji had gone to Germany after his escape from India. The Indians who were in Germany started fondly calling him Netaji. The Indians had formed an Indian Legion of their own and they entrusted the leadership of their organisation to Netaji.

" You will be surprised to learn that the prestige of Indians went up in German eyes when Netaji arrived

in Germany so much so that Indians were allowed to marry German girls and many of them did.

"In the Far East, the local inhabitants had a very poor opinion of Indians. As a matter of fact, they loathed them. There are two reasons for it.

"(*a*) ECONOMIC: Because an Indian labourer would accept the same job at half the wages which a Malayese was doing for full wages. The Indians there started cut-throat competition with the very sons of the soil. This naturally generated caustic bitterness in the hearts of the native population.

"(*b*) POLITICAL: The Far East people felt aggrieved against the Indians as a whole. They said that not only you people accept the slavery of the British but help the British in making them slaves as well.

"And they were perfectly justified in their attitude towards Indians. But with the arrival of Netaji, they for the first time in their life saw a true specimen of Indian manhood . . . a living symbol of Indian culture . . . a personification of India's aspirations.

"Overnight they changed their opinion about Indians and of their own accord started appreciating our activities and lent support to our great work—the Freedom of Mother India," replied Prem.

"The unity of thought and action that you people achieved under the banner of the I.N.A. was nothing short of superhuman. Will you please explain what were the things that welded you all into a strong and

unbreakable chain, " I said.

Seghal took out his right hand from his pocket and let it flutter for a while in the air as he started speaking in a deep resonant voice :

" The goal that was set forth before us by Netaji was the Freedom of India. And he abundantly made it clear to us, individually and collectively, that the rough road to that goal was strewn with dangers, privations and sufferings. His inspiring words still ring in my ears. 'I promise you no jobs when we attain our goal. I promise you no ministerships when we free India. I promise you no rewards for the sacrifices you make. I promise you thirst and hunger in your glorious march. I promise you poverty and hardships on your way. And, finally, I promise you death,stark naked cruel death, on your arduous journey."

As he uttered these words I could see him being wafted by these sentiments to the historic place where Netaji had addressed them. Physically Prem was with us. But his mind, his soul, his inner self had been transported to the Far East as if he had gone there searching for Netaji to speak to him in the same strain.

His face, which had become for a second waxen because his soul was wandering in the jungles of Burma, suddenly became a little twisted. I could see that something was searing his sensitive soul. With a pathos in his voice he resumed speaking :

" Alas ! Here in India things are different. Instead of the sweet harmony of unity of thought and action, my ears are jarred by discordant noises. Instead of placing the Ideal of Freedom in the forefront and working

for its immediate attainment, quite a lot of parties and groups here strive for their own respective shares and places in the framework of Free India . . . . "

" Oh yes, " Miss Evening interrupted him. " Look at these Communists. In their enthusiasm to ' communise ' India, they forget the ideal of Freedom First."

Miss Noon wanted to hurl some words of fire against the Communists as her eyes blazoned at the very mention of the word Communists, but Prem unintentionally started speaking first.

" You will be surprised to learn that I too am a Communist. I wholeheartedly believe that power should rest in the hands of the workers in the factory and the peasants in the fields, and that the teeming millions of India are our real masters. I believe in the nationalisation of the key and heavy industries of my country."

He clenched his fist and, banging it on the table, said :

" But I firmly believe that all these ' isms ' mean nothing to me or to my country till she is free. Our foremost duty is to break the shackles of slavery. By laying stress on ' isms ' we are bound to forget our great common ideal—the Freedom of India. In other words, it will be like placing the cart before the horse. My appeal to the Communists is that they should forget their Marx and march along with Gandhi, for Gandhi symbolises the struggle for freedom. And when India is free, our Communist friends will be at perfect liberty to capture the legislatures and throw out the whole lot of the capitalist legislators from the floor of their

assemblies."

VII

Was I listening to Prem or to Nehru ? The voice was of Prem, but the philosophy was that of Nehru.

Prem now stared at each one of us: His eyes stopped rolling as he moved his head in a semicircle. For a while it seemed that they were carved out of stone. In a voice raised to the highest pitch he thundered : "If we are working for Hindu domination from the centre, I for one declare that I shall remain a slave as I am. Such a state of affairs will be the continuation of the present slavery. I am not interested in the transference of power from the British to any community or party. I want the completest power to be delegated to the masses of India, for they are the soul of India.

"Let me repeat my appeal to all groups and parties of my land. Let us free India first and then whatever form of Government India wants she shall have it. I detest power politics as much as I detest indigestion. And this bedlam of party slogans is like heart-burn. I feel restless.

"In the Indian National Army there was no such thing as power politics. The very idea was like a plague to us. And does anybody want to harbour plague germs in his body ?

"Netaji had placed one and only one ideal before us and that was . . ." He paused for a while awaiting our answer.

PREM AND ALL OF US : The Freedom of India.

"It never occurred to us as to what will be our fate

after the liberation of India. Members of every religion, party and creed had all merged themselves into a single fighting unit.

"I would give my life to see the same benevolent spirit moving us into a common brotherhood of India."

As I scrunched the fag end of my cigarette in the ash tray, I happened to look at our friend Miss Noon. In her eyes I found the flaming torch of enthusiasm burning with deep red brilliance. Before the flame could subside and be snuffed out by the chilly blast of helplessness, she raised herself a little from her seat and with a deep ring of passion in her voice asked Prem: "Tell us what girls should do to herald the new era of common brotherhood."

Prem's sensitive mind appreciated her galloping enthusiasm and in affectionate notes addressed her thus:

"You must get hold of your brothers and explain to them that they should enlist themselves as selfless soldiers in the army for India's freedom. You should convince them that power politics is poison and you know what happens to a person who takes poison."

But Miss Noon was not satisfied with this academic advice. Being a woman of action and quick results, she wanted some magic to be poured into her itching hands. She wanted to dash away from the room with the magic in her hands. She wanted to sit on the radio-waves and go to Peshawar, to Madras, to Dibrugarh and spray this magic from the skies on the people of India to revolutionise their outlook.

The transformation of her brothers or her immediate

relations meant nothing to her. She was concerned with India . . . her 400 millions . . . her ignorant squalid moving skeletons . . . her fastidious, hair-splitting-drawing room politicians . . . her contankerous, self-centered party bosses.

A deep feeling of frustration seemed to hold her in its sharp cruel tentacles. She wriggled a little and burst out :

" Tell us what *we*, *we* girls should do ? "

As I am reproducing the interview sitting in the Coffee House, the words " what *we*, *we* girls should do " float in the curly spirals of cigarette smoke with which the room is practically full.

With a naive smile and a quick little twitch of his lips, Prem pacified her raging passion.

" You girls are most welcome to plunge with a dash into the arena of India's war for freedom. "

Miss Noon shrugged her shoulders as if she was getting ready for action. She nudged Miss Evening as if she were seeking her approval to follow her lead.

A bearer arrived with a chit for Prem and the lively conversation was cut short.

VIII

Miss Dawn poured another cup of tea for us and asked everybody to finish it before we started harassing Prem with a volley of questions. I lit a cigarette and reclined on the sofa to rest for a while.

As soon as Prem finished nibbling the remaining half of the crisp chocolate biscuit which for the last fifteen minutes he had been wanting to do, I said to him:

" Don't you think that discipline is as important as

the singleness of idealism and that mental unity of thought without rigorous physical discipline in the day to day working of the national organisation will not carry us further in our fight for freedom ? "

Unhesitatingly Prem replied : " We need not only discipline, but vigorous discipline in our life. I have served in the army for a good many years and I know the value of discipline.

" Its function in any army is unique. To fight with the help of soldiers who in a moment of crisis cut the knot of discipline that holds them together is like playing with wild forces. Why did Russia win this war against Germany ? The only answer is that her armies were disciplined and ; . . . . . "

At this stage Miss Evening intervened and said: " But the German armies too were disciplined."

" That is true," replied Prem. " But the German armies were disciplined only when they were marching from victory to victory. The moment they tasted the first bitter pill of defeat they lost their nerves. You know very well the cowardly way the Huns started running from Stalingrad. The Russians suffered defeat after defeat in the beginning of the war. Right from the new Polish frontier to the factory area of Stalingrad they kept on withdrawing in a most orderly manner. Everything happened in a disciplined way.

" Now the question arises : why were the Russians more disciplined than the Germans? The one and the only answer is that the Red Army was fighting for a noble cause—the preservation of its freedom. This ideal generated that spiritual discipline in their minds which

defeat could never shatter nor reverses rend asunder.

"While the Russians were fighting for peace, liberty and honour, the Germans were fighting for loot, slavery and aggrandisement.

"As far as we are concerned we need more discipline than any other country because the circumstances in our country are different from those of any other country. We have adopted Non-violence as the instrument for our fight. We are pitched against organised violence. And in a non-violent fight the need of spiritual discipline is supreme. Spiritual discipline is the very life and blood of a non-violent army."

The last few meaningful sentences of Prem took me by surprise. "Here is a man sitting before me who, though has fought with arms all his life, yet knows the technique of non-violent fight," I said to myself in a low whispering tone.

IX

The conversation with Prem was so absorbing that none of us realized how quickly the time was fleeting. We all felt like having Prem amidst us for hours . . . But Prem looked at his watch and said : "Oh, I am already late."

In a rather hesitant tone I said to him : "I shall be honoured if you could tell me what impression Bose created as a military strategist on the Axis Powers."

"You will be surprised to learn," came the quick reply, "that at a Conference of the military attaches from Germany and Tokyo, Bose was listened to by every member of the conference with rapt attention. I was present at the conference. As I looked around, to my

utmost joy I found that the members of the German delegation were simply hypnotised by Bose's masterly analysis of military affairs.

"At that conference important decisions were taken and the advice of Netaji was communicated to Hitler personally. And believe it or not, if Hitler had acted on the advice of Netaji, the course of world history might have been different."

"What was that advice ?" I almost shrieked.

"It is not proper on my part to divulge it. It is an extremely confidential matter. And this secret shall always remain with me."

The words, "If Hitler had acted on the advice of Netaji the course of world history might have been different," kept ringing in my ears. The spoken word dies soon and the sweetest of melodies linger on for a second on our ear-drums. And before our senses have fully enjoyed them the ether snatches them from us.

But these words seemed to have been spoken by lips wet with nectar. They drifted all over the room. I could hear a faint echo of these words in every corner of the room. It seemed to me that the laws of sound were helpless to merge these words into the vast endless ether that surrounds this universe.

I am the last person to poke my nose (as the slang goes) into other people's secrets but this time the wicked impulse whispered into my ears : "Change your tactics and you shall know the advice."

With childlike innocence on my face (rather unusual !) I mildly said : "But why did not Hitler accept the great advice ?"

The sharp wit of Prem saw through my game and laughingly he said : " Oh no, no, you can't ensnare me into divulging the secret."

I appreciated his deep sense of humour and joined in his laughter.

Laughter against me. So what?

We all got up and thanked Prem for honouring us with his pleasant company.

Miss Evening walked towards Prem and asked him to teach her the Jai Hind salute. With electric alertness Prem raised his right arm and swiftly placed his palm in an almost horizontal line on his forehead.

The three girls stood in a line before Prem and smartly tried to copy the salute. But the tender arm of Miss Dawn could not vitalise itself to place the stretched flat palm against her forehead in the 30° angle direction. Prem just lowered her palm and said : " Quite simple."

Miss Noon with great triumph and joy said to Prem : " I am known in the college as Shah Nawaz." Miss Dawn said : " I as Prem." And Miss Evening said : " I as Dhillon."

Jai Hind to these female Shah Nawazes, Prems and Dhillons.

X

As I shook hands with Prem and asked for an appointment some time tomorrow, he opened his diary and said : " Look at my engagements for January 10th. The page is black with the hours of the day. The only time that I am free is from 9 to 10. Can you come at

that time ? "

"Well, I detest getting up early but since you are helpless, I shall have to come," I grumbled.

Now, dear reader, we must wish each other good-bye for the time being. Tomorrow morning I shall call on you at 8.45 and take you along with me on our second visit to Prem.

READER : You promised me that we would meet all the three heroes. What about Shah Nawaz and Dhillon ?

SELF : Well, both of them have gone away to their respective villages and as soon as they come to Lahore I promise to take you along with me. Please have some patience. As I told you in the beginning our expedition is unplanned. We do not know where and when we shall meet them. You and I could never dream of meeting Prem on the very first day of our journey. But here you are, we met him. Thanks to the three smart girls.

READER : If you happen to meet them, please thank them on my behalf.

SELF : And if you chance to meet them, don't forget to mention my name when you are thanking them.

"Good night."

"Good night to you. Don't forget, 8.45 tomorrow."

CHAPTER III

TWO LITTLE BOYS FROM TOKYO

I slept at the house of my friend Siri Ram Luthra. If I had gone to Model Town it would not have been possible for me to reach Lahore at 9. The reason being that my mother never makes me get up in the morning even if I take an oath from her that she must. She knows that I work till one or two in the morning and whether I care to have proper sleep or not she under no circumstances will be a party to my lack of rest.

Siri Ram, being a thorough hard-boiled disciplinarian, roughly shook me at eight. All my appeals to let me lie a little longer in bed were brushed aside with pungent contempt. I almost cringed before him supplicating mercy. But all overtures were pooh-poohed.

With curses and abuses ceaselessly oozing from my heart (but I did not express them) I lazily dragged myself from bed. And once you are out of bed, it holds no fascination.

An author's laziness is the very last thing which – if he has any sense—he should offer for sale to the people. There is already too much laziness in India . . . . too much lethargy in her people. But this book being a personal record of my expedition such references become inevitable.

And since you and I are no longer strangers but comrades in hero meeting, it is pleasant to gossip on our way.

Instead of turning to the road on the right that faces

Government House, I drove straight on. The reader immediately pointed out that I had to turn to the right. I reversed my car and apologised.

I have not a grain of road memory and I always hood-wink myself by saying to myself: "I am a dreamer." Whether I am or not I do not know. Since I don't dream at night, I *feel* that I must be dreaming during the day.

But you will be surprised to learn that I drive recklessly break all traffic rules, but never have had an accident for the last nine years. I *just* ran over three men in the first year. But that was ten years back ! I was prosecuted so the police need not harass me and quote these words as a confession.

The reader touched my head and smartly said: "Touch wood."

It is wonderful to start the day's work with a companion who is not only intelligent and a dare-devil, but displays a rollicking sense of humour as well.

God bless you !

II

As I alighted from the car a sweeper with a broom brandished in the air greeted me with Jai Hind. The sweepers in India suffer from a despicable inferiority complex. Being the lowest strata of Hindu society they have lost all sense of self-respect. When I see a man who does not respect his own manhood, I feel like hurling stones at the God who created him.

But the case of our untouchables who do not know what it is like walking upright is different. The incubus

of Hindu society's prejudices lies so heavily on their narrow and bony shoulders that for them it is like making an effort to walk straight, with chest forward and chin up.

Put a bag full of wheat on your shoulders and try to walk straight. If you will not, as I know you will not, at least imagine yourself in that tortuous position. Does not your backbone start cracking ?

Well, that is the day to day condition of our untouchables.

But this sweeper who met me on the 10th morning was a transformed man. He stood straight before me like a pole and as he fluttered his broom it seemed as if he was waving his national flag. And his greeting of Jai Hind was like a war cry against shameless orthodoxy.

The spirit of Jai Hind I am sure will not only bring us our political freedom, but will usher in the dawn of the social emancipation of our untouchables as well.

As the sweeper moved towards me there was no trace of servility in his behaviour. He talked to me like a man, though "socially" I was his "over-lord." The words Jai Hind had revolutionised this crouching mass of abject fears and lowliness into a strong man of respect, equality and confidence.

If only the millions of our pariahs could shout Jai Hind in one resonant voice, the heinous practice of untouchability will be a story of yesterday.

Let us hope they follow the example of this gallant sweeper.

What pleased me still further was that the sweeper

in spite of the newly-acquired consciousness of prestige, respect for his own person, and even faith in the nobility of his own work was not in the least churlish. He was courtesy personified. And who can deny that a strong man alone is well-mannered?

The men who try to assert themselves by being arrogant are at heart cowards, cads and mean intriguers. It is only the cattish backbiters who pose as "strong" men. And how do they express the "strength" of their diseased mind (please excuse me for the mixed metaphor) - by being rude, uppish and sometimes patronising?

Perfidy . . . Damnation . . . Cry Havoc.

Let us leave such foul men (and foul is the word for them) to the verdict of their own conscience, and ask our "low-bred" gentleman to inform Prem that we have arrived.

The sweeper told me that Prem was having a bath and he himself escorted me to the drawing-room.

III

You will remember that I introduced you to the two young cadets while we were having tea at the *Lorangs*. Well here they are again, perched on the sofa with their heads down on the morning papers.

What was the great news they were searching for? The greatest news-story for the Indian public will be just three words: BOSE STILL ALIVE.

But that would be the banner headline of the front page.

These boys are so much in love (and love is the only

word to describe this relationship) with Netaji that every morning they scan not only every line of the newspaper, but read in between the lines to catch hold of the faintest suggestion that Bose is still alive.

While we wait for Prem let us have a little chat with these kids.

SELF : Could you tell me all about yourself?

ATTAR MOHD : I am just seventeen. My home town is Amritsar. As my father is a cloth merchant in Malaya at Penang, I got my schooling there. I appeared in the Senior Cambridge examination three years ago, (with infectious *laughter*) but the result is not yet out :

" When the Indian National Army was formed under the ægis of Subash Chander Bose, an irresistible wave of enthusiasm swept over the Far East. Formerly we just existed, but with the appearance of Netaji we found life running in our limbs, blood throbing in our heart and strength creeping into our flesh.

" I realised that the hour had struck to fight for the freedom of India. I immediately offered my services to Netaji. Forty-five of us were selected for military training. Preliminary training was given to us in Koadogokur Preparatory School at Singapore. After one year's training we were transfered to the Imperial Military Academy at Tokyo. There we were given a thorough training in all the methods of modern warfare. Netaji used to take a personal interest in our welfare. He would send us nice chatty letters."

IV

At this stage Attar stopped talking. I looked at

him. I knew he was wrestling with his tongue to speak. But a heavy lump of emotion had stopped up his throat. The very name of Netaji turned this lively little boy into a silent sentimental figure of emotion and memories. But as he had had a thorough military training, he disciplined his feelings and resumed speaking.

"In August, 1945, when Japan surrendered we were discharged from the army. After a month of our discharge we were taken over by the Americans. They transported us by a plane and we were flown to Manila, which was British occupied territory. Now the British took charge of us and they kept us in detention. The food given to us was very bad and we complained to the Americans. The Americans were very considerate and helped us a lot.

"In November, 1945, we left Manila in an aircraft carrier. We were all huddled up in a small store-room. The soldiers guarded us as if we were murderers. We were asked to raise our hands and were thoroughly searched. They took away all our valuables, such as watches, fountain pens etc."

At this stage Satya Prakash, mischievously said : "And do you know how I managed to save my set of Parker 51 ? I just slipped them down my neck into the back of my shirt. The pen and pencil stuck near my back. The soldier rolled his hands all over my body, but failed to rub against my set."

He fondly unclipped his pen from his pocket and like a spoilt child started comparing it with mine.

"How much did you pay for it ?" he asked me.

" One hundred and twenty-five," I replied.

" Must be the black market. I too bought in the black market and paid 100 dollars for it," he said.

Attar Mohd resumed his talk.

" On November 13, 1945, we reached Hongkong. Under a strict military guard we were taken to a local jail. The soldiers were very rude to us and their treatment towards us was very rough."

Satya Prakash intervened and said :

" One of our comrades, Mr. Nendra, was given a sock on the jaw by a soldier."

" And what happened next ? " I asked Attar.

" On Dec. 10, 1945, we were put on board H.M.S. *Glenearn*. We were locked up in a store-room near the boilers. The room was very hot. Staying in that room was like having a steam bath. Six Dutch sentries kept strict watch twenty-four hours over us. These sentries were very human and the food that we got was quite good.

"At last on Dec. 29 we reached Madras *via* Singapore, Hongkong and Shanghai. All the 45 of us were interned in a camp and were interrogated by the C.I.D. They paid us Rs. 5 for our expenses to reach Lahore. We protested that the amount was insufficient and it was increased to Rs. 20. We had no clothes and it was biting cold . . . ."

V

At this stage Prem arrived. We all stood up and greeted him with Jai Hind. Before we could talk, his mother asked him to take his breakfast ; otherwise he

would never get time to have it. Prem obeyed her and said to me:

"Please excuse me. I shall be back soon. Meanwhile you talk to these boys."

"We have already been having a very interesting conversation. Please take your time and eat at leisure," I replied.

As Prem entered the adjoining room the whole lot of people stood up and the ladies started singing in a chorus the song of the Indian National Army. The music of the words was so melodious and the sentiments of the verses so enchanting that Attar, Satya Prakash and myself spontaneously jumped up from our seats and stood to attention.

In the whole of the house there was not the slightest noise when the rapturous song was being sung. The cook in the kitchen had stopped clattering the utensils; the sweeper had stopped fluttering his broom on the road and the *chaffeur* had stopped dusting the black giant car.

There was perfect stillness in the atmosphere but inside us the waves of patriotism were roaring. Even in me. Hurrah!

After the sweet song was finished we resumed our conversation.

ATTAR MOHD: I have forgotten where I stopped. The music of this song wafts me to Tokyo where we used to sing it. When I hear this song everything before me vanishes, into space. The princely figure of Netaji remains fixed before my eyes and . . . .

He could speak no longer. It seemed that emotions had crystalised themselves into a solid lump and blocked his throat. He heaved a long deep sigh and swallowed the lump.

"Oh yes, now where did we stop ? " he said in a voice which I knew was not his own natural voice. He was just acting because inside he was struggling with his emotions. And you know what sort of voice you produce when you have been moved by memories of dead herœs and lost love ! Instead of being clear, full and flowing it becomes husky, jaded and broken.

I looked at my note-book in which I was scribbling his sentences in my own peculiar and original kind of short-hand and said : "We had . . . . . oh yes . . . . . no clothes . . . yes . . . biting cold."

Attar started speaking in his own old natural voice again.

"Then we reached Delhi and straight from the station we went to the office of the I.N.A. Defence Counsel at the residence of Mr. Asaf Ali. The Defence Counsel treated us with a courtesy that almost embarrassed us. They gave us money to proceed on our journey. We reached Lahore on Jan. 6, 1945 and reported ourselves to our senior officers."

SELF : When you joined the I.N.A. you were just fourteen. Boys of your age ought to have been chasing butterflies in the fields and playing marbles on the road. What made you sacrifice your golden boyhood and voluntarily adopt a course of life bristling with rigorous discipline, day and night hardships, and eternal fear of death?

I could see that Attar was waiting every second for me to finish the sentence. Hardly had I pronounced the word death fully when in a modest and restrained way he started speaking. There was not the faintest echo of egotism in his voice.

"I wanted to serve my country. When Netaji arrived and assumed the Supreme Command of the Indian National Army, I realised that the long awaited opportunity to serve my Indian people had come my way. I found him a man of action, of daring action. I had heard of his great courage before. He was a strong-willed man and as soon as I found that the Indian National Army had been organised for the exclusive purpose of freeing India and that too without the help of the Japs, I offered my services to Netaji. If I had the slightest doubt that the Japs were using Netaji as a pawn in their Imperialist game, I would have run away from him as if he were a ghost.

"The words of Netaji : 'If I want the help of Japanese I can have it, but I want to win the freedom of India with the help of Indians alone,' made me decide to join the I. N. A.

"But Netaji was like a god to us. He was a superman. He was a man of extreme independence. He would never allow himself to be bought by any foreign power. He would rather have seen himself being shot than being dictated to by the Japs."

SELF : What was the response to Netaji's appeal for men, material and money for the I. N. A. ?

ATTAR MOHD : He got more volunteers than he

could train. And those who were not accepted felt bitterly disappointed. And as regards money, millions and millions of dollars poured into his hands. People not only gave Netaji money, but their personal valuables. At every meeting men would hurl at him their golden watch-chains and women would remove their bracelets and ear-rings and offer them to Netaji.

SATYA PRAKASH: At Penang Netaji was addressing a mammoth meeting. A man came forward to Netaji and said: 'This gold brooch, which has got a special sentimental value for me is for you.' But Netaji got wild and gave it back to him saying: 'I do not want anything for myself. I am not doing anything for my own sake.' The soldiers are doing everything and all what I get is theirs.

SELF: Could you tell me some other reminiscences of Netaji?

SATYA PRAKASH: Netaji once came to Tokyo and attended a party. The tables were laid with the choicest dishes and tastiest fruits. There were *poories* also".

Satya Prakash's mouth started watering when he lisped the word *poories*. He licked his lips and said:

"The tables were loaded with glistening knives, forks and spoons. I was anxiously looking towards Netaji as to how he would start eating. I was surprised, but mind you, it was a pleasant surprise to see Netaji eating with his fingers. Not even on one occasion did he use a spoon.

"Netaji always dressed himself in an ordinary officer's uniform. He never wore any decorations which

as the Supreme Commander of the I. N. A. he was entitled and was even expected to wear.

ATTAR MOHD : On the second day of the formation of the Provisional National Government, Netaji addressed a big meeting at Singapore. I mean Shyonan, because at that time, the Japs gave it that name. The rain was pelting on the heads of the people like shining marbles. But believe it or not, not a single man or woman or child budged an inch from his or her seat. To me it seemed as if pilgrims had come from far off countries and had squatted on the ground to see and pay homage to their Master. Netaji spoke for two hours and the whole of the audience listened to him spell-bound.

As I was an interpreter of Netaji for some time, I was sitting close to him. He himself had no umbrella. Some of us offered one to him but he refused saying : 'How dare I use one for myself when thousands and thousands of my brothers and sisters are being drenched with rain ?'

SELF : What opinion had the Japanese of Netaji ?

ATTAR MOHD : After this speech a few Japanese friends told me that Netaji was the best orator they had ever heard in their lives. They told me that Netaji was a man of superhuman virtues. In him, they said, they saw the true leader of East Asia. Another Japanese friend told me that he believed in Netaji more than in anybody else.

Once in Hibiaya Park, Netaji addressed a meeting. A few thousand Japanese gathered to hear him. There

was so much of clapping from time to time that Netaji had to discontinue his speech to let the deafening noise die down. The Japanese were inspired by his lofty ideals. Enthusiasm flashed in their eyes as if they had seen new light.

Netaji once addressed the students of the Imperial University of Tokyo. As we left the hall, I asked a Japanese student what he thought of Netaji. Promptly he said: Netaji is a great man, greater than General Tojo. If Tojo dies, Japan can produce a hundred Tojos. But, if Netaji dies, who is there to replace him ? He is a born leader, a sincere man, a selfless worker. You must all stand by him, give him your helping hand, lighten his burden by bearing his responsibilities, cheer him up by sharing his sorrows. He is fighting for the freedom of India, so march under his banner; do as he asks you to do and die when he asks you to die. Freedom is won on the battle fields and not on wooden rostrums and in assembly chambers.

SELF : Did you visit the city of Hiroshima after the havoc caused by the atom bomb ?

ATTAR MOHD : I did. The whole of the city was a charred and burnt heap of ruins. And whatever people were saved were wracked with pain, wounded and suffering. I saw people vomiting blood. Their half-naked bodies were plastered with red suppurating sores, with not a hair on limbs.

I visited some patients in the hospital who were more seriously injured. And here I saw the most gruesome sight of my life. The skin of their arms had been torn away by the radio-active waves and it was hanging in a ghastly manner around their wrists. And . . . . .

Chapter IV

PREM MEETS HIS OLD COMRADES

At this stage Prem arrived after finishing his breakfast and I had to discontinue my conversation with Attar.

We had a little chat. I asked Prem about Col. Ehsan Qadir, who was a great friend of mine in college days. 'Showing off' as a dear well-meaning friend of mine remarked when I said that Ehsan and I were friends and in college days used to play tennis together. The lady was right. I was showing off. But who would not boast that Ehsan was his or her friend.? Prem said that he saw him in the Indian Military Hospital and was much better.

A servant brought a message that some Azad Hind Fauj soldiers had come to see Prem.

Instantaneously Prem said : "Excuse me. You do not mind if I meet them first. I am sorry to keep you waiting."

"Not at all. Your first and foremost care, I know, is the welfare of your comrades," I replied.

As Prem stepped out of the verandah I heard in perfect timing the sharp masculine click of shoes. It was followed by the salute of Jai Hind.

I have heard all sorts of people saying Jai Hind at all sorts of places.

Boys playing marbles on the road and shouting Jai Hind.

A tongawalla shouting Jai Hind into the ears of the horse which had slipped and had fallen on the ground, as if the words Jai Hind would enthuse courage into the horse to get up.

A little boy beggar, near the popular Punjabi playwright I.S. Johar's house said Jai Hind to me and stretched out his hand. I gave him a pice. He refused to accept it.

"But why?" I asked.

Innocently he said: "I am a beggar of the Mall Road. I *must* have an anna."

I burst out laughing. The boy stood stunned. Perhaps he thought: "How can we beggars make 'gentlemen' laugh? We only make them lose their temper."

I gave him four annas and said: "Now donot start begging at Government House and ask for a rupee on that ground."

Little boys on cycles, shooting past the traffic constable not obeying his signal and when the poor constable whistled, with a grin on their face they would turn their heads back and shriek, Jai Hind.

Labourers in the factory pushing a huge iron girder shouting: "*Ah Jawan* (*youug man*) *Jai Hind*," instead of their old slogan: "*Ah Jawan Heh-Hiha.*"

A rummy player shouting Jai Hind when the "middle pin" was thrown by his neighbour and the sequence thus made enabled him to declare the hand and collect a few hundred rupees. .

Enthusiasts in the Coffee House saying: "Will you have a cup of coffee? Jai Hind, with or without cream."

II

But the way these eleven soldiers shouted Jai Hind was unique. In every syllable of the two words there was sincerity; in the high and low pitch of their voice vibrated the resolution to achieve their goal. In fact, they wanted to tell once again the spirit of Netaji which they felt was hovering around them that the Holy Oath which they took before him lay embeded in their hearts.

I was so much moved (or rather lifted is the proper word) by this shout of Jai Hind that involuntarily I left the room to see what sort of men they were.

In two rows, like bayonets fixed in the ground, these men stood. My heart started cantering in my chest.

Prem, with a gentle flutter of his hand, asked them to close around him. Immediately they stepped forward and formed a semicircle. The orderly way in which they moved made me feel that, if an electrician had planted toys on the table and linked their legs with electric wires to the terminals of a battery and arranged them in such a way that the pressing of the button would make them step forward, he would not have achieved the same success.

The eyes of all were fixed on Prem. Prem seemed to be so much overwhelmed by their affection and memories of comradeship that he would sometimes stare at the dust, sometimes glance at the withering leaves of the trees, sometimes sweep his eyes around the faces of his soldiers . . . friends . . . and brothers . . .

There was an old broken Sikh with, a face wrinkled like a walnut and a tapering silvery beard; a stalwart

strapping Pathan, with ruddy cheeks and glistening eyes; a short stumpy hillman, with bulging round cheeks exquisitely set on his broad thick cheek-bones; a calculating little slim Hindu *bania*, nodding his head as if he were weighing grain in his shop; a middle sized Sikh in the bloom of youth, with the consciousness beaming on his face that he was the sixth in the line of the "*Panj Piaras.*"

And, finally, as I stood on my toes to see the man who was every now and then raising his head from the back, I found a small Hindu with an unshaven face and hollow cheeks. He had a squint. He had turned his face towards Prem, but his eyes could not see him straight as he wanted to see. His protruding eye-balls would roll towards the extreme corner of the eyes every time he made an effort to stabilise them in the middle.

III

What men! . . . What men! . . . I said to myself. For the first time I fully grasped the true meaning of the word National. This word to me has always meant something not controlled by the British; something not blackened by communal rivalries. But here before me I saw the positive side of the word National.

Men of all communities, young and old, from every corner had assembled, with the common purpose of reporting to their senior officer. There is a peculiar charm in the words "reporting to their senior officer." I am so gripped by these words that I feel like joining the army simply for the fascination of telling my sisters:

"Hurry up, get into my car if you want to go uptown. Today at 10-30, I have to report to my senior officer."

We the rank and file of the unorganised national forces have never realised that there is such a thing as a senior officer as well. Each one of us thinks or rather takes it for granted that he in no way is inferior to Dr. Gopi Chand, that he is as intelligent as Chaudhri Krishen Gopal Dutt or that he is the equal of Dev Raj Sethi.

You and I may one day become greater than they are today. But the fact remains that they are our senior officers. And we should occasionally report ourselves to our senior officers.

Yesterday for the sake of reporting to my senior officer I went to Mr. . . I found I was a different man . . . a disciplined man . . . willing to obey and keen to do my duty.

But we just gossiped. I had gone to take my orders. We discussed Gandhism. I smoked a few cigarettes and came back the same old man . . . pining to do something active, here and now . . . longing to lighten the burden of my senior officers . . . proudly waiting to march along with them . . . restlessly itching to be the first soldier to plant the tri-coloured flag on the Red Fort of Delhi.

Shall I linger on the fringe of hope ? . . . Shall I keep on moaning over my helplessness ? . . . And finally shall I languish away in frustration ? . . .

Shall I ?

"Yes, you will," says a voice.

"No. . . No. . .," I shout.

"You will," the voice laughs.

Many a youth like me, I know, has withered away from the garden of nationalism. They waited for the spring . . . they waited for the merry winds to breathe blossoms into their nationalist feelings. But autumn came. Like lurid shrivelled leaves they clung to the dry branches . . . the icy cold winds of winter blew and they were swept away from the tree of patriotism into the Radio Departments . . . into the Liaison Offices of the Army . . . . into the Information (or perhaps Misinformation) Departments of the Government of India.

JAI HIND TO *THOSE* CONGRESS LEADERS OF THE PUNJAB WHO FIGHT FOR POWER LIKE THE BENGAL FAMINE DESTITUTES OVER A HANDFUL OF RICE.

By not organising the forces of nationalism, the Congress in the Punjab has with its own hands thrown jewels into the dust-bins. Will they keep on hurling pearls before swines or will they treasure them in their caskets and polish the facets of these precious stones?

If Christ spent a few days in Bradlaugh Hall, He would say: "It is easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye than it is for the Congress leaders of the Punjab to create a single united front against British Imperialism. The British Government need not get panicky. Its future is safe in the hands of its enemy-cum-friends."

IV

Prem talked to this heterogeneous group of Indian humanity for about fifteen minutes. He asked each one of them about his family and whether they were in need of anything. He told them that he was leaving for

Delhi on the 15th January with the special object of organising the Central Relief Committee of the I.N.A. and would see to it that each and every member of the Azad Hind Fauj was provided with a decent honourable job.

Prem took half-a-step forward as he wanted every one of the men to hear distinctly.

"You will remember that you gave your word of honour to Netaji that you would fight to the last drop of your blood for the freedom of India."

A prompt sound of one long "Yes, sir" swept from one corner to the other.

"Well, Netaji is no longer with us. The freedom of India has not been won as yet and there is blood in your veins. Now, the question that faces us is : 'What should be our course of action? Must we give up our fight for freedom because the man to whom we gave our oath is dead?'"

Each one of the soldiers jerked his head a little and shouted in unison : "No. . . Never!"

"You know very well that the Congress has been waging a relentless war for the freedom of India against Britain for more than fifty years. From now on our duty is to march under the banner of the Congress. In the Far East we fought with arms and, since the Congress is fighting here with non-violent weapons, henceforth we shall use non-violent arms.

"Netaji represented the spirit of India in the Far East. The Congress symbolises the same benevolent spirit in India. By shifting our allegiance to the Congress we are living up to our word of honour. Are we not?"

Promptly came the resolute reply: "Yes. We understand."

"Now my advice to you is this. Do not be caught in the web of propaganda that the different political parties will lay for you. These parties are not fundamentally interested in your welfare. They just want to exploit you to further their own selfish ends.

"Your allegiance from now on is to the Congress and if you are in trouble or in need of anything, you must at once report to the Congress Committee.

"Now I must leave you as I have an urgent appointment.

"Is there anything else that I can do for you?" asked Prem.

"We have just come for your *darshan* and report ourselves to our senior officer," the brave soldiers said.

Prem shook hands with each one of them. The Azad Hind Fauj soldiers lined up in a single row and gave Prem a magnificent salute of Jai Hind. Prem stood before them like a prince.

I had never seen Prem standing so straight and firm as he was standing now. He shouted Jai Hind. I had never heard him shouting in the same big voice.

Perhaps the sight of his old comrades transported him to the jungles of the Arakan battlefields. He found he was on the march . . . on the march with his old comrades . . .

V

Prem came to me and apologetically said: "I am sorry that I have kept you waiting. It is already ten-

thirty and I have to rush to keep my second appointment of the day. To-day I am meeting the press correspondents at 4 at the People's Assurance Company's Office. So you also come. There I shall be unrolling the origin, development and aims of the Indian National Army and I am sure it will be of great help to you."

I told him that I would attend the press conference.

I went to the drawing-room to fetch my notorious file. As I came out and sat in my car, a taxi arrived. To my great joy I saw Dhillon and his wife stepping out of the taxi. I immediately got out of the car and introduced myself to Dhillon and said that I would like to see him for a few minutes. Dhillon told me that he would just have a hurried bath and would be back soon.

I again went into the drawing-room and started chatting with our old friends, Attar Mohd and Satya Prakash. These young boys were very keen to understand the present-day conditions of India. With great attention they listened to all that I said.

I found these boys were not only soldiers, but budding politcians as well. All that they were concerned with was the freedom of India. They looked at every problem from that angle. They were not in the least bothered as to which party came into power and which men held the reigns of responsibility.

How many men are there in India who think in terms of Freedom and Freedom alone? And how many men are there who do not worry as to what they get when freedom is won?

You know the answer very well. So I need not pursue the matter further.

JAI HIND



Gurbakhsh Singh Dhillon

Chapter V

PRESENTING DHILLON

After taking his bath, Dhillon came and sat next to me. Before I tell you what happened then, let me describe this hero to you.

He is a tall young man with a rough swarthy complexion. His cheeks are not as full as Prem's are. But he is by no means thin. He possesses broad shoulders and his chest is manly—it reminds you of the Rajput warrior.

His rather hollow cheeks are in no way an index of lack of flesh. Flesh he has, full of vitality and bubbling with strength. What he has not got is the little extra fat of Prem.

If somebody had introduced him to me as a champion marathon runner, I would have believed him. His slightly sunken cheeks give you the impression that he is a 10-mile record-breaker. He is as fit and full of athletic vitality as a centre-forward hockey player.

His eyes are very restless. They are not shining. You find a thin light earth-coloured veil around his eyeballs. When he is sitting face to face with you, his eyes just look at you for a while and then wander. Suddenly he remembers that he is talking to you, and, for the sake of courtesy at least, must be looking at you. He controls the movement of his eyes and fixes them on your eyes.

But having done their middle-class social duty, the eyes start rolling all over the place again.

I wonder if he has ever felt like addressing his friends thus:

"Why should I keep on looking at you all the time when I am talking to you? Is not my physical presence enough? Why are you not satisfied with my spoken word? I listen to every word that you say. My sharp ears catch every syllable you utter. My mind thinks over your questions, problems and doubts. And like an intelligent, well-balanced man I reply to your questions and talk coherently. But still you want me to look at you, and not only that, want my eyes to hold your eyes in a never relaxing embrace. Why do you want me to do that. Why?

"For God's sake—for Netaji's sake—let my eyes play as they want to play. Please, in the name of the dead heroes of the Azad Hind Fauj, let my eyes run like little boys chasing butterflies in the bushes. *Please*, in the name of Prem and Shah Nawaz let my eyes be as they want to be."

As regards his voice, he has a big manly voice, the type of voice you hear rushing from the lips of a Sikh Jat from Central Punjab. He does not believe in talking with lips half-closed as quite a lot of the effeminate young men of Lahore do, after sipping their *chota* brandies. He wants his voice to run and flow in the natural round way.

He is a man, a rough man, a caveman if you please. I have used the words rough and caveman purposely. But my saying that he is a man should have been sufficient to make my meaning clear.

But unfortunately . . . unfortunately by the word man we just conclude that an individual called by the

name man is not a woman. Our conception of the word man is only negative—negative that "he" is not "she."

Very few of us realise the positive side of the word man. And what is that positive side? A full, clear voice, broad shoulders, and a rough (take this word rough in a modest way) plus gentle (but not too gentle appearance).

Are quite a lot of our young men, who pose half an hour before the mirror when shaving and then another forty-five minutes in the bathroom singing the Great Waltz (You told me, you loved me) in any sense men?

God himself must be feeling sorry for having made them men. If God reads this book and compares these female men with Dhillon the Man, He would satisfy their womanly propensities by making them in their next life into some member of the female species.

I do not think God will make them into women. Why? Because being men they behave like women and God knows, (God knows is used in the literal sense) when they become actually women, what they will do.

Roll in a bed of powder so that the very soles of their feet are powdered!

Keep on applying rouge on their cheeks till their cheeks look like Khandari pomegranates!

Rub lip-stick on their lips, till they look like carved pieces of burning charcoal!!!

I wish God would make me a man in my next birth, if for nothing else but to see these men as women, walking on Mall Road with a mirror in their left hand

and with their right hand powdering their faces.

But who knows the next life ?

The next life itself is a poetic fancy. And I being one billionth of a poet feel sometimes swept into atmospheric fancies.

II

Before we could start our conversation a postman arrived. There must have been at least two dozen letters for Dhillon alone.

Dhillon opened a few and hurriedly skimmed through them. But one letter he started reading intently. "What could that letter contain ?" I said to myself. Was it a letter from the Home Department saying that in the near future all the members of the I. N. A. would be released ? Was it a letter from Brailsford congratulating Dhillon on his acquittal and asking him for an appointment to get first-hand information about the I. N. A. ? Was it a letter from Gandhi asking Dhillon to stay with him and learn the philosophy of *Satyagraha ?*

What could that letter be which Dhillon was reading with as much care as if a finger-print expert was examining the thumb impression of a clever murderer ?

It is no good your guessing, because you cannot. I know you are itching to know its contents. And just to tease you I feel like writing a few more paragraphs before I tell you what that mysterious letter contained.

But I shall not.

Well, this letter was from a sixth year student of a

local college

I do not remember the exact wording of the letter so I cannot reproduce it *in toto*. I wish I had asked Dhillon to let me copy it. But, absent-minded fellow that I am, I forgot to make that request.

But I will reproduce the substance of the letter. The words used by me I am sure will be different (better or worse the writer of the letter can judge), but the spirit of the letter *does* move in my words.

It was a fairly long letter, but I shall just write a few sentences.

The learned student wrote that he was very proud of Gurbakhsh Singh Dhillon till the day he actually saw him. Until that day he applauded Dhillon as a hero.

But when he saw him clean-shaven he was disillusioned. And Dhillon in his eyes fell from the high pedestal on which he was sitting.

Then he asked Dhillon to explain the "wicked impulse" which had goaded him into cutting the sacred *Kesh*.

In the end the correspondent said that he used to feel proud that one of his co-religionists was fighting for freedom and that is why Dhillon was his hero. But now Dhillon had ceased to inspire him.

The letter, of course, ended ironically with, "Yours faithfully."

As Dhillon was reading this letter, I noticed that he looked very perturbed. The deep sarcasm of the words dipped in pungent ink mercilessly cut into his inner peace.

He held this letter in his right hand and fluttering it before the gathering said :

"Look at the letter I have just received. This is not the only letter of its kind that I have been receiving. I have received dozens and dozens of them. God knows how many I shall receive in the next few days that I am in Lahore.

"The writer says that he does not expect any reply because he knows I will not give any. He is sadly mistaken. I will give him a public reply."

As Dhillon finished this sentence, I could see in his anguished eyes that his tender heart, in which throbs the spirit of Guru Nanak, had been seared by the red-hot words used by the Young student.

Then he hung his head low and scratched his clean-shaven face as if he was feeling disgusted with the unfair attitude of *some* of his co-religionists. He twitched his cheeks a little in anger.

His restless eyes had stopped their former prankish escapades. They stared and stared at the velvety multi-coloured carpet lying listlessly on the floor.

Suddenly he found life moving in the triangles and octagons of the carpet. He seemed to ask them :

"Please tell me why *some* of my co-religionists are angry with me? Must a man fall in the estimation of his Sikh brothers simply for the reason that he was forced by circumstances to cut his *Kesh*? Shall my sacrifices for the freedom of India slip away into oblivion because I don't grow hair on my chin? Shall I again bounce up in the estimation of these critics

who are breathing words of fire against me, if I re-grow my former long hair? Shall I succumb to their threats? Should I to please them declare that from today I shall not use the guilty safety razor? Hurry up and answer me."

But the sympathetic figures on the carpet simply said: "Don't take any hasty step. It is a vital matter. Take your own time and carefully consider the pros and cons of this difficult problem. Don't act in the heat of the moment."

As the question of re-growing the hair is essentially a pensonal matter, I did not think it wise to seek further clarification.

For the sake of curiosity (and every journalist must possess a sharp curiosity which keeps on biting his journalistic conscience unless its edges are dulled by being satisfied) with great politeness I asked him why he cut his hair. I made it clear that if I was being personal I would readily apologise.

"Oh, no. Not at all," affectionately replied the great-hearted Dhillon. "The thing is that I was ill for a long time. And the doctors advised me to cut my hair. It was in 1943, on the second day of *Basakhi* that I got it cut."

III

Dhillon went upstairs to put his mail in his trunk.

When he came down I asked him when I could see him alone for half an hour.

"Well, it is twelve o'clock already. At this time I was supposed to be addressing a meeting in a village.

I had asked my taxi to leave me there, but it has not arrived yet. The driver has gone to get permission to motor outside municipal limits. The moment he arrives I shall shoot to my village. The best thing would be if you come along with me in the car and we shall have a chat on the way," he replied.

"That will be wonderful," I thanked him.

We waited for half an hour but the taxi did not arrive. I told him that my car was parked outside and I would love to take him in my car.

Practically every important leader of the Congress has been driven in my car, so I thought I should take my latest hero in it also.

When Netaji was the Congress President I drove him once in my car when he visited Lahore.

Some unfair critic might say : "Look, you are trying to show off."

Well, all that I can say is that such a man is jealous of my car and my proud achievement. When I use the word achievement, I mean every syllable of it.

For an insignificant working journalist like me it is not only an achievement, but the proudest achievement of my life, and perhaps of all lives to come, to have driven a man like Netaji in my car.

Thousands and thousands used to storm Netaji to have just a glimpse of him when he visited Lahore. I doubt if they all got it.

But Netaji sat with me . . . near me . . . on my front seat for full fifteen minutes. And if you please he talked to me . . . to me.

So, dear critic, please don't dirty your chaste lips by uttering the foul word "showing off."

In the hum-drum life of most of us there are very few instances that sparkle. The life of most of us is one long dreary journey. And if these personal reminiscences shine on our rough and gloomy road why should we not talk of the beckoning light to cheer us, to show us the way, to make us feel proud on our life's journey.

IV

Dhillon came outside with me and when he looked at my car he just gave me a comradely smile. For a second I presumed that he would burst out in a loud laughter. But being a thorough-bred gentleman he said: "Yes. Thanks very much. We shall go in your car."

I felt honoured that he had accepted my hospitality and had not insulted my car by disdaining to sit in it.

He asked the servant to lodge his luggage in the car. But unfortunately the number of articles was more than my car could accommodate. Over and above his wife had to sit also.

With a heavy heart I told him that it would not be possible for us all plus the luggage to go in the car.

"Then what are we going to do?" Dhillon said with a worried look on his face.

"Take it easy. I shall go to some of my rich friends who have bigger cars and borrow one for you," I calmly replied.

"You won't take long?" Dhillon questioned me.

"Half an hour is the maximum," I assured him.

I went to six of my friends but, as bad luck would have it, none was at home. God knows where they had gone during office hours. Perhaps to exchange their thousand-rupee notes in the black market!

I felt very disappointed and cursed my rich friends for making Dhillon and me a victim of their wartime profiteering.

But I was determined to get the car. So I decided to run up and down the Mall in the hope that somebody would turn up.

Hardly had I done my second trip of wild (or better still black) goose chasing, when I saw Manmohan driving his car in the usual aristocratic way.

I shouted to him as if I wanted him to save me from a dacoit. He jammed the brakes and stopped his saffron coloured car before me. I felt sorry for his tyres.

I explained the whole situation to him.

"Look," he snubbed me. "Why didn't you come to me straight? You know, you can always depend on me for anything in the world."

I appreciated his affection and bowed my head in thankfulness.

The luggage was put in the car. Mrs. Dhillon sat in the front seat with the driver. And we three in the back seat.

Poor Dhillon sandwiched between the publisher and the author!

He must have thought that these two boys would take the very entrails out of his stomach.

But we had no such intention. We just wanted his heart to speak. We had planned to make Dhillon talk and relate his reminiscences of Netaji.

V

There ensued a little lively conversation, in which we all perched in the back seat like three sparrows took part.

Manmohan, being a shrewd business man asked Dhillon which part of India had played the most important role in securing their release.

Unhesitatingly Dhillon replied : "It is difficult to measure the respective quotas of the intellegentsia and the masses. But I do want to make it clear that without the superhuman co-operation of the intellegentsia, the enthusiasm of the masses would not by itself have been powerful enough to secure our release.

"During the days of our trial, we used to wonder at the superb courage displayed by old men like Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Bhulabhai Desai and R. B. Badri Das. They had forgotten the meaning of rest. For full four months they did not know what relaxation was. The very word leisure did not exist in their life. If at all this fanciful spectacle did have any place, it lay in H.G. Wells's *The Shape of Things to Come*. And what was That *Shape of Things to Come* ?

"I am not exaggerating when I say that Utopia for the members of the Defence Counsel was nothing else but our release. Each lawyer sitting on the opposite benches of the Prosecution Counsel worked with a passion which defies description.

"We have no words to express our thankfulness.

"The English language, I am told, is perhaps the richest in the world. It pulsates with powerful verbs and splendid adjectives sparkle in its vocabulary. But if I were to spend a month doing nothing else but to turn over the pages of Webster's dictionary, and search for the fittest words that could convey the quintessence of my feelings of gratitude, I am sure I would fail and fail miserably.

"And who can forget the unique work done by Nehru? If I were to write a letter to him with the ink of fluid gold, even that would not be worthy of his immaculate selflessness."

VI

The car was being driven at a fairly high speed. As it crossed the entrance of Model Town, I asked the driver to retard its speed and not be in a hurry to reach the destination.

Dhillon just smiled as he saw through my game.

The obedient driver slowed the car so much that it seemed as if he was following the marriage procession band.

I felt supremely happy!

But Dhillon nudging me mischievously reprimanded me: "But not so slow, Jag."

"All right," said Manmohan in a business-like tone. "We shall have a compromise." And he ordered the poor driver in a regal style: "A *little* faster."

Dhillon resumed his conversation and said: "But at

the same time the great work done by the masses in securing our release must not be forgotten. When we were in the Red Fort we could hear the 400 millions shouting to the Government of India: 'We demand their release.'

"The peasants in the fields with the ploughs in their hands said to the bureaucracy: 'What has the I. N. A. done? This Army of Indians did nothing else but fight for our freedom. How dare you punish them?'

"The workers in the factories with the hammers in their hands proclaimed: 'Brave sons of India who were prepared to sacrifice their precious youth at the altar of our liberation shall not be adjudged traitors.'

"The students all over India with their text books safely lodged in their shelves, marched in endless processions and addressed the conscience of England:

"'The soldiers who fought for the preservation of England's liberty are received by you as glorious heroes. Why should our soldiers who fought for the freedom of India be sent to jails or made to face the firing squad? We must have our heroes in our midst to honour them, to pay homage to their gallantary and be inspired by their chivalry.'

"Every educated man sitting at his office desk admonished the British Parliament: 'The Indian National Army was not a hireling of the Japanese. The Azad Hind Fauj was an independent army functioning under the Provisional Government of Free India. The army took its orders from none else but from its own Government.

"'This Government was recognised by so many independent States. Every subject nation, according to International Law, has the right to wage war against the country that holds it in subjection. Respect the morality of this time-honoured code. We shall not see even a single hair of our soldiers touched.'

"When the British Government saw that the whole of India was speaking with one deep sonorous voice, it was left with no other choice but to bow to the will of the masses."

VII

At this stage Dhillon suddenly patted the head of his wife and lovingly said: "Look at that tree. Do you remember you once almost crashed the car against it, when I tried to teach you driving?"

Mrs. Dhillon looked back and sweetly said: "Yes, I remember the incident. But where is the tree?"

"There. There it is," smiling Dhillon pointed with his finger.

But there was not one tree on the road but dozens of them standing magestically in a row along the road. The car had run about a hundred yards and it was a futile effort to spot *that* particular tree.

We all three kept silent for a minute and felt sorry that Mrs. Dhillon could not see *that* tree.

VIII

I requested Dhillon to narrate some of his reminiscences of Netaji.

He scratched his head a little and plaintively said: "There are so many. I cannot make up my mind which

I should narrate."

"All right, I will help you. Tell us when you met him first," I replied.

"I had never met Netaji before. Once in Rangoon General Aziz Ahmad brought the message that Netaji wanted to see me as he wanted to discuss certain things personally with me.

"When I went to see him I felt extremely excited. The excitement was most natural as I was going to meet the Supreme Commander of the Azad Hind Fauj. Moreover, I was thrilled at the sight of talking to one of the greatest leaders of Modern India.

"Netaji had had a very busy day. He had just attended a Press Conference.

"I was received by his A.D.C. and ushered into a drawing-room, which was spartanly simple.

"As I looked straight my eyes beheld the Great Leader calmly standing in a corner.

"After shaking hands with me he asked me to sit down.

"Without wasting any time he went straight to the subject. Suddenly I found myself a target of his volley of questions. He did not discuss any politics, but the centre of the conversation was purely military affairs.

"For full fifteen minutes I was made to answer his questions. He went into the minutest details of military affairs. I kept on answering. Unless and until he was fully satisfied he would relentlessly pursue the subject.

"Some times he would probe so deep into the heart of a subject that I had to consult my note-book.

"I wondered at his superb mastery of military affairs. I found myself up against a man who knew his job. No detail was too minute for him. No problem was too unimportant for this genius.

"I felt extremely proud that I was able to satisfy a man like him.

"Two cups of tea were brought and he offered me one.

"We had *pan* and *suparis* after that.

"When we were absorbed in a deep discussion there was a loud noise outside the house. He left me and stood near the window. I wondered what that great noise could be which held Netaji in a hypnotising grip.

"He called me and I stood near him. Gently he rested his hand on my shoulder and said to me: 'Look at that monkey. He is very annoyed. The people down below have been teasing him and I know he will never forget.'

"I was amazed to see his capacity of detachment. Suddenly from the tension of discussing important military affairs with me, he switched off to an insignificant thing like the study in the habits of monkeys.

"The study of nature was to him as colourful and full of passion as the understanding of military problems. He possessed an extremely sensitive and human heart."

IX

As Dhillon uttered the word "Netaji" I heard pathos ringing in his big manly voice. The volume of

pathos grew bigger and he felt his throat was a little choked. He jerked his head a little and cleared his throat with a sharp quick cough and resumed speaking :

" For another two hours Netaji discussed military affairs with me. And I felt immensely glad that I emerged unscathed from this baptism of cross-examination fire.

" He asked me whether I was satisfied with my present job and I said 'no' and told him what work I would like to do.

" As I stood up to take leave, he asked me how I had come. When I told him that I had motored down, he immediately questioned me if I had enough petrol to drive home.

" His personal interest in the welfare of his soldiers was great and spontaneous."

X

Dhillon relaxed a little in his seat and with a smile that was child like and bland said to me : " Are you satisfied ? "

" Well, a hungry journalist like me can never be satisfied. Even if I feel satisfied, the greed in me is not. So please don't leave me in frustration. Tell us one more reminiscence. What you say is a first-rate news story."

He lifted himself a little from his cozy position of relaxation and with a mixed feeling of anger and affection said : " All right."

What cruel and inhuman beings we journalists are !

" At the time of this interview I found that Netaji's eyes were not only red, but swollen as well. I was greatly

perturbed to see his paining eyes and asked him what was wrong with them. With complete unconcern he replied : 'Oh, nothing.'

" This indifference towards his own health irritated me and before I could beg of him to get his eyes treated, he just rubbed them with his handkerchief and started discussing important military affairs with me.

" When I came out of the house I questioned the A.D.C : 'What is wrong with Netaji's eyes ?' The A.D.C. said that many a day Netaji had not slept for more than an hour a day.

" An ordinary man if he had worked for two days without any sleep would not have been able to conceal the fact. But Netaji was so great and so much above the common level of human beings that he was at pains to conceal the fact that he was overworked.

" I for one was at my wit's end to understand of what flesh and blood this man was made.

" After seven days I was called again by Netaji. This time he saw me in his own room. I was surprised to find that his small room was not only his bed-room but his study as well. It was monastically simple.

" To my great joy I was told that Netaji had entrusted the Command of the Nehru Brigade to me. I assured him that I would strive every fibre in my being to prove worthy of his trust and in no circumstances, would let him down.

" He just smiled, and said : 'I have confidence in you.'"

Chapter VI
DHILLON AT THE VILLAGE

The conversation was so absorbing that none of us noticed that we had entered the village. Suddenly we found the car stormed by a large crowd surging with enthusiasm as if the car contained a phial of nectar and it was going to be distributed among the people of that village.

With great difficulty Dhillon managed to get out of the car. Dozens and dozens of wreaths were put around his neck amidst sky-high shouts of : "Dhillon Zindabad."

As the happy crowd, with Dhillon their uncrowned king in the centre, moved towards the dais, Manmohan and I stepped out of the car. Needless to say, a few garlands were flung at us as well!

I stood in a corner and watched the crowd, which was restless like mercury in a giant crucible. There were strapping Jats with polished sticks in their hands; mothers carrying small babies proudly thinking that if the sucklings looked at Dhillon they would be like him when they grew up; two old Sikhs were lying on their beds, with their shaking heads resting on a pile of pillows.

Perhaps Dhillon in his boyhood had played at their knees, and they had come to have a look at him, as the final desire of their lives.

All round there was affection and nothing else but

affection. The atmosphere was unbearably dusty. But in the dust particles which were floating in the almost opaque air there was universal love.

I detest any kind of noise. But the present intermittent babel had a peculiar charm of its own. It was not artificial. It was spontaneous and heartfelt. In this chatter there was no discordant and jarring note but like the ceaseless hum of a swarm of bees, it had a ring of music.

The villagers were so happy to see one of their own men becoming the idol of millions that they felt themselves to be a part of Dhillon's sparkling personality.

The consequent joy and enthusiasm were so spontaneous that any attempt at curbing the onrush of their emotions was to them a nefarious crime.

II

As I looked at Dhillon sitting on an improvised dais, I found him completely overpowered by the love of the village folk. He sat dumb and motionless. There seemed to be perfect communion between him and the crowd. The people were so gripped by the hypnotic personality of Dhillon that they wanted to keep on looking at him. And Dhillon was so mesmerised by their love that he too longed to feed himself on the love with which the atmosphere was surcharged.

But this unexpressed and unfelt communion was shattered when a dumpy middle-aged Congressite sprang to the stage and requested Dhillon to speak a few words.

Slowly the hero of the millions raised himself from the posture of deep meditation and started speaking in a voice vibrating with affection and gratitude.

To my complete surprise I found the whole crowd sitting still on the ground with their mouths shut as if their erstwhile fluttering lips were sealed at one stroke.

" Since my release from the Red Fort, I have addressed many meetings, but the affection that I see and feel here I have always been missing. Let me tell you frankly that I don't deserve it. The deserving recipients of this love are the Dead Herœs of the I.N.A. and Netaji who inspired them to lay down their lives on the altar of Freedom.

" I myself just stand here before you as the representative of the fearless soldiers of the Azad Hind Fauj. And on their behalf I accept your immaculate offerings of love and reverence.

" The speaker just now congratulated me on my release. It is not I who deserve congratulation but it is you whom I should congratulate. You demanded our release and the British Government had to knuckle down to your behest.

" We gave our lives when we joined the Azad Hind Fauj. It mattered little to us whether we were shot or set at liberty.

" Whatever we did for our country was done abroad. In India we have done nothing.

" When we were in jail we had certain fears that news of the great work done by the soldiers of the I.N.A. might not be allowed to reach you. The propaganda machinery of the British Government was moving with efficiency and the truth about the motives of the I. N. A. was being smothered under its merciless

wheels. But when Nehru raised his voice of protest, things took a sudden happy turn.

"It was proved during the trial that the I.N.A. was fighting for the freedom of India as an independent army. And that in reality was our proudest victory.

"When I was in Burma an Englishman ironically told me that we would be spat at by our own countrymen. But I vehemently maintained that the people of my country would acclaim us as selfless soldiers of India's fight for freedom. With great pride I proclaim that my prophecy has come true.

"In the Far East our life was not a bed of roses. It was one long endless struggle. The rations that we got were just enough to keep us alive. Many a time we had to sleep on empty stomachs. But let me tell you that even with gnawing of hunger, the atmosphere of freedom was far more pleasant than are these present days of spurious plenty."

Dhillon stood on his toes and, raising his muscular arms before the audience thundered : "I would rather live on the air of freedom than be pampered with the choicest delicacies of slavery."

Hardly had Dhillon finished his sentence when the whole crowd spontaneously shouted and reshouted : "Dhillon Zindabad." Dhillon wanted to resume his speech, but the people were so much moved by his great sentence that they persisted in their acclamation.

For a good five minutes the villagers shouted this slogan and their empty rugged huts kept on resounding with equal enthusiasm.

Dhillon stood with his eyes cast down and when the faintest echo had died down he gently lifted his eyes and said : "Many kind friends have asked me about my future plan of work. My one categorical answer to them is that day and night I feel worried about my I.N.A. soldiers. I am so much concerned about the welfare of the families of the brave dead heroes that my mind refuses to entertain any thought about my own individual work.

"Before I dare chalk out any plan for my own self, I must see that the demobilised soldiers of the I.N.A. are provided with decent jobs and their destitute families guaranteed permanent subsistence allowances.

"Before I finish my speech let me answer the question which is topmost in your mind. Though you have not put it to me in so many words, I see it written on your foreheads. That question is regarding the reported death of Netaji."

As Dhillon finished his sentence, the whole of the audience nodded their heads, and with open mouths gazed intently at the speaker.

"Well, as far as authenticated reports go, withsorrow that I cannot express, I have to say that he is dead."

The big manly voice of Dhillon suddenly trembled. He uttered his words so falteringly that if I had heard him speaking for the first time, I would have taken him for a strutterer.

Slowly he said :

"The reason why no one in India believes that Netaji is dead is that they do not want him to die. This wishful thinking is so powerful that no amount of logic

can stand before its sentimentality. The love that is embedded in the hearts of millions for Netaji is so spontaneous that it detests the very idea of his death.

"My daily prayer to God is just five words: 'May Netaji be still alive.'"

As Dhillon said these words he raised his head towards the skies. With reverence in his eyes and passion in his voice, he was praying to the One Who is Knowledge Personified.

After saying this prayer Dhillon sank into the chair for he was tired at the very thought of Netaji's death.

IV

Near the open ground where the people had assembled there was a little grocer's shop. We all four were taken to that shop and served light refreshments. The tea with the sugar and milk cooked in it was poured into metal tumblers as is the practice in the villages.

To my pleasant surprise I found *Peak Frean's* salted biscuits daintily arranged on shining brass saucers. The sight of these crisp biscuits was so tempting that I helped myself to two of them and completely forgot to offer them to Mrs. Dhillon first.

The host seemed to have treasured the packet for many a year to open it on some rare occasion of joy and jubilation. And what could be a greater pleasure than to offer them to Dhillon?

Dhillon asked me to stay with him for a day at his village, but I could not accept his hospitality because at 4 p. m. on the same day Prem was giving a Press Conference and I had promised him that I would attend it.

Manmohan and I thanked our host and dashed to Lahore as it was already three o'clock.

CHAPTER VII

THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE INDIAN NATIONAL ARMY

Before I attended the Press Conference, I had some fears that Prem might feel nervous in the company of journalists who are past-masters in the art of cross-examination. The enquiries of Press correspondents are so incisive that sometimes even seasoned politicians falter and feel embarrassed. Press correspondents dive so deep into the heart of the problem that no slipshod treatment of the subject is tolerated.

But to my pleasant surprise I found that Prem not only satisfied the journalists, but won their unstinted admiration. For nearly an hour he spoke so coherently and intelligently that the poor Press boys could not even lift their heads. They kept on taking notes. Prem's account of the development of the I.N.A. was so fascinating that every word he said was good copy for the Press.

"Gentlemen, the first two questions that I would like to answer," said Prem, "are the following:"

"A. Why did we start the movement of the I.N.A. in the Far East?

"B. Why did we take Japanese help?

"The obvious answer to the first question is the fundamental urge in every slave race to be free. Indians in the Far East felt duty-bound to wage war against British Imperialism.

"The answer to the second follows from the first. We needed help to start our movement, but no country like Russia, China or America was in a position or willing to lend the required support to our movement. So there was no question of pick and choose for us. Japan was the only country which was in a position to give us help and prepared to extend its co-operation.

"Moreover, we fundamentally believed that no outside power could give freedom to India. Verily it is like expecting a stone to give milk. Even if a foreign Power bestowed freedom upon us, it would be but a nine days' wonder. No sooner we had got it than we would lose it.

"But if we won our freedom and fought for it with our own blood, we knew that we would retain it. The sublime sacrifice thus offered to the goddess of Freedom would engender supreme will-power to retain it and such freedom would not be snatched away from us by any foreign Power, however mighty and greedy it might be.

"When we started the I.N.A. movement we firmly believed that if the Japanese withdrew their support or did not agree to our terms, we should be in a position to attain enough strength to follow our own course of action independently and, if need be, to oppose them.

"It is most unfair for critics to say that by taking Japanese help we had mortgaged India. Let alone bartering the future of India, not even on one occasion did we lower ourselves before the Japanese.

"When Germany declared war on Russia, Churchill

promised all-out help to Stalin. But Churchill also made it abundantly clear that he would not withdraw a single word or sentiment that he had said or expressed against Bolshevik Russia. So if it was good enough for Churchill to help Russia to defeat Germany, why could we not take Japanese help to defeat the British ?

" Further, I would like you to bear in mind that the Indian Independence movement had originated from the very beginning of II World War. Rash Behari Bose had nursed it. It did not take practical shape till the summer of 1942 when a conference of delegates from all over the Far East was held in June, 1942, at Bangkok and it was resolved to start the I.N.A. on a proper basis.

" In pursuance of the decisions taken at this conference the Indian National Army was organised on Sept. 1, 1942. The initial strength of the I.N.A. was fifteen thousand and it was intended to raise another fifteen thousand within the next few months.

" Soon after the formation of the I.N.A. differences arose between the Japanese and our army. Though in the initial stages we were not in a position to continue our work without foreign assistance, we were determined not to be dictated by any outsider. The very idea of knuckling down to the Japanese because they were giving us help was abnoxious.

" Categorically we told the Japanese that if they did not agree to our terms, we would break up the I.N.A. I do not want to go into these differences and to cut the story short, let me tell you that we disbanded the I.N.A. in pursuance of our ultimatum to the Japanese.

"The Japanese tried to woo us, but we stood firm in our resolve. They tried to bring us down in our demands, but eventually they themselves had to come down to agree to our demands when Netaji was coming to the Far East. We raised the I.N.A. again and reorganised it with the idea that as soon as Netaji came he would assume the leadership of the entire movement. We knew that he was the one man who could guide us on the right path.

"Subhas Chander Bose reached Singapore on July 2, 1943. Soon after his arrival Rash Behari Bose resigned the presidentship of the Indian Independence League in favour of Netaji Subhas Bose. On August 25, 1943, Netaji assumed the supreme command of the I.N.A."

II

Suddenly I felt a peculiar tickling sensation in my back. For a second I thought that a few ants were running up my shirt. But no. As I turned round I found that my friend Dutt, the local manager of the *United Press of India* who was sitting next to me on the sofa had placed his note-book on my back and was scribbling his notes. Evidently he had felt the strain of writing on the note-book placed on his knees.

Instead of apologising he snubbed me with his original Donald Duck accent: "You are practically half my age. Bend back a little more and let me write in comfort."

Needless to say, I obeyed him because every time I visit him in his office he feeds me on *rasgulas*.

III

"I would like to clear another point," said Prem.

"And that is: Was it correct for one and the same person to be the head of the Civilian Government and the Indian National Army? There are two reasons for the fusion of these two functions in the same man.

"First, in the Far East there was no person who was in any way the equal of Bose. In India there are dozens of leaders, all of whom are intelligent. But in the Far East we had only one leader and we had to entrust the Army and the Civilian Government to Bose.

"Secondly, the main purpose of our organisation set up in the Far East was to prosecute and carry on the war for the independence of India. It is no exaggeration to say that the Indian independence movement was a war machine. In these circumstances it was essential for harmony of action and co-ordination of work that the same man should be the head of the political organisation as well as of the army.

"When Netaji assumed command of the Indian National Army, it consisted of only one division. It was decided to expand it. Within a short time two more divisions were raised and the fourth was in the process of formation.

"The next important event that took place was the formation of the Provisional Government of Free India. This Provisional Government was a properly organised body in every sense of the term. It was recognised by many foreign countries. It had its own independent sources of revenue and two and a half million men owed allegiance to it.

"So for all practical purposes this Government can be considered grown up and strong enough to declare

and wage war against Britain for the freedom of India.

"The Andaman and Nicobar Islands were handed over to this Government. Formal documents were exchanged to effect this transference. Netaji told the Japanese Government that these Islands were essential for the prosecution of India's War of Independence. It was mutually decided that the Provisional Government should take over these departments gradually from the military administration.

"I have heard some unfair critics say: 'Why did not the Provisional Government at once take over the entire administration of these Islands?'

"Well, gentlemen, you know that in times of war it is impossible to hand over the entire administration of even a district to another authority, let alone transfer of the administration of such big islands. This process in the very nature of things had to be effected in degrees.

"And further you must bear in mind that we had neither a navy nor an airforce to defend these Islands from enemy attack. So it was decided by the Provisional Government that the Japanese Army and Navy should continue the defence of these islands.

"I am sure you all understand why we could not take over the entire administration of the Andaman and the Nicobar Islands."

As I looked round I saw a circle of heads nodding.

IV

"Now, gentlemen, I shall survey briefly the actual

fighting done by the Indian National Army.

"Number one Division first went into action in the area of Tamu and Imphal. Other units of the I.N.A. consisting of the Intellegensia Group, the Bahadur Group and a battalion of No. 1 Regiment fought in the Arakan area. In the Arakan battle all our units crossed into India in that area and the main forces of the I.N.A. entered India in the Palel, Bishenpur and Kohima areas.

"In the middle of April, 1944, units of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment arrived in Burma and the brave women waited for orders to move into India.

"At this stage, a new organisation, known as the Azad Hind Dal, was set up. This was a civilian organisation on the military pattern. The function of this organisation was to carry on civil administration in the liberated areas. Col. Ehsan Qadir was appointed the leader of this organisation and Major-General A.C. Chatterjee Governor-Designate of the Liberated Areas.

"Units of the Azad Hind Dal moved with the foremost units of the Indian National Army and were actually in India when the I.N.A. units crossed into India. For some time military administration was carried on in Manipur State in an area of about 1,500 sq. miles by the Indian National Army and the Azad Hind Dal.

"Gentlemen, you will be pleased to learn that throughout the period that No. 1 Division was in action, no unit of the I.N.A. was ever defeated by the British forces. The heroism displayed by our soldiers was superhuman and when the National History of India is written, the names of these brave men will sparkle in its pages.

"These gallant men knew only two words: DO OR DIE."

V

As Prem said these words in low long accents, I looked at him. His tough body relaxed under the stress of emotion. For a while he was no longer an astute politician and a man of the world. He was meditative and sentimental like a youth intensely in love.

With half-closed eyes he looked at me. In his eyes I could read pages of homage that his mind wanted to pay to his fearless soldiers. But he controlled his surging emotions and resumed speaking:

"By the middle of July, 1944, on account of heavy rains, the road behind which we were fighting literally turned into a sea of mud. It was physically impossible to transport ammunition, rations and medical supplies to our front-line soldiers. The cruel rains shattered all our means of communications. Therefore, it was decided to withdraw the advanced armies from Manipore to the Chindwin line. Our plan was to reorganise our units from that base and to launch an attack when the weather conditions became normal and favourable.

"When the Division under the command of Major General M. Z. Kiani was withdrawing, it had to face terrible hardships on the way. There was practically no food worth the name and medical supplies were ludicrously inadequate.

"With a heavy heart I have to tell you that hundreds perished from starvation and hundreds of sick persons died due to lack of the necessary medicines.

"Those who were able to stand the crushing hardships of the arduous journey were so emaciated that they had to be treated for weeks in the hospitals."

Prem clenched his fist and, banging it lightly on the teapoy, in a deep resonant voice said :

"Gentlemen, with great pride I tell you that the members of that Division did not, even for a moment, think of deserting the Azad Hind Fauj. The Britishers were promising them luxurious food and good clothing. But they scoffed at these allurements and spurned the very idea of giving up their allegiance to Netaji. They preferred to starve and die at the feet of their Commander rather than to loll in plenty and comfort in the lap of the Britishers.

"To-day once again sitting before you I salute those unknown mothers who gave birth to such intrepid sons. And in my most humble way I bow to Mother India of whose dust these mothers are made.

"To cut short the story of our withdrawal, let me say that the First Division eventually withdrew to Mandalay. It was the end of the summer of 1945 and we fully knew that the Japanese would not be able to hold Burma any longer. As we looked into our future, we realised that it was not too bright.

"As far as Japan was concerned we found that she had practically lost the war.

"But our War of Independence was in no way dependent on a Japanese victory. Our faith in our ultimate victory remained unshaken. We did not waste any time in thinking of the victory of Japan. To us it mattered

little whether Japan won or lost. Ours was an independent and a separate fight and, as such, we had to continue it.

"Even though we had to face terrible reverses and withdraw against heavy odds, we firmly believed that the final victory of India would sooner or later be a palpable reality. The Indians inside India and the Indians outside India had amply demonstrated that they not only wanted freedom, but were prepared to sacrifice their all for the attainment of this noble goal. And if such be the determination of the people, there is no power on earth which can hold them in subjection.

"When we were taken prisoner in Burma, the strength of the Indian National Army was nearly 50,000 armed men and there was a large reserve of another 90,000 men. Owing to lack of arms, we could not equip them. But they were fully trained and were kept in readiness to replace casualities as soon as we got supplies of ammunition and necessary material.

"In addition to this we had carried out what we called part-time training of civilians in Burma and Malaya. In every town there was a unit of the Indian National Army to run two to three hours' military training of all Indian civilians. And that fluid organisation formed another substantial reserve.

"In 1942, when the British evacuated Burma, Indians had to undergo terrible suffering. Their property was looted. Therefore, Netaji left a garrison behind him to protect the life, honour and property of Indians. The I. N. A. soldiers kept vigilant guard during the days preceding the British occupation.

"When the British forces of occupation arrived, the I. N. A. guards were withdrawn. Some days later two Indians in the suburbs of Rangoon were murdered. The British military authorities requested the I. N. A. personnel to resume patrol work in the suburbs. Needless to say, from that date no Indian was murdered, nor any dacoity committed.

"On May 14, 1945, the I. N. A. troops surrendered to the British authorities in Rangoon. Netaji himself, along with his headquarters, had evacuated Rangoon on the 24th April. His intention was to continue the struggle for the freedom of India from Thailand and Malaya.

"Netaji established his headquarters in Thailand. At that time came the atom bomb and Japan was left with no other alternative but surrender.

"Netaji left Singapore in a 'plane for Tokyo. His intention was to organise a separate surrender on behalf of the Provisional Government of Free India. But the ill-fated 'plane crashed in an airfield in Formosa. The only Indian present with Netaji was Col. Habib-ur Rahman. Both of them, as you know, were wounded. but to our great sorrow Netaji did not survive his serious injuries.

"However much we may dislike believing it, the fact of his death has been established."

VI

When Prem uttered these words, his clear full voice had become husky and broken. He heaved a long sigh of grief. For a moment I thought that he would not be able to speak any longer. He took out his hand-

kerchief and quickly dried the two teardrops that were on the verge of falling from his eyes. He moved a little in his chair and continued speaking :

"Gentlemen, I would like to answer another question, which has been put to me very often : 'How is it that Netaji was able to bring about unity among members of different religions, classes and creeds ?'

"The first reason was his personal spirit of sacrifice. His anxiety about the welfare of the members of the Indian National Army was so intense that every soldier and officer felt irresistably drawn towards him. Though he was the Supreme Commander of a big force, he lived a spartanly simple life. His rations were just the same as those of the ordinary I. N. A. troops. Never for a minute did any soldier think that his highest chief was eating better food.

"Secondly, wherever the fight was the thickest, Netaji himself was there. Many a time we had to beg him to move away from the dangerous frontline. But all our appeals fell on deaf ears. He was always prepared to face the enemy's bullet just as much as any other soldier in the advanced trenches was expected to face.

"Thirdly, he promised no big jobs to the participants in the freedom movement. Time and again he made it clear that he himself was a mere servant of India and all those who fought shoulder to shoulder with him were doing the noble duty of a faithful servant.

"His sole ambition in life was to free India. After liberating her from the foreign yoke he told us that he would ask the Indian people to form their own Govern-

ment and choose for themselves the men who would hold the reins of power.

" He made it clear to us that only those people should join the I. N. A. who were prepared to undergo the cruelest hardships, and if need be, to die in the course of the struggle. Our goal was to free India. Beyond that happy spectacle we never bothered to see what lay before us. That glorious vision was so enchanting that any lurking thought of our own future but shattered the harmony of that dream.

" The ideal of a free India united all ranks of the Indian National Army and welded all Indians into a strong unbreakable entity ready to suffer, sacrifice and die. When the standard set before us by our noble leader was to die, the insidious bacilli of bickerings, frictions and jealousy had no chance to breed and eat into the vitals of our great, selfless and patriotic organisation."

VII

I asked Prem if he would answer a question of mine. " Oh yes," came the prompt reply.

SELF : Did the passing of the August Resolution have any influence on the formation of the Indian National Army ?

PREM : Before the passing of the Quit India Resolution by the Congress, we did not know fully what our course of action should be. But this Resolution showed us the light. At that time we were not certain whether we were justified in starting the movement outside India.

When the British Government launched a ruthless campaign of repression in India, we felt duty bound to threaten the alien Government from outside.

SELF: What would have been your course of action if the August Resolution had not been passed by the Congress ?

PREM: There are many ifs in the history of the world and this is but another if. Since that date so much has happened that it is difficult to describe now what would have been our plans if the August Resolution had not been passed. I might have joined the I.N.A. or I might not have. I cannot give you a definite answer.

SELF: In the beginning you yourself stated that the independence movement in the Far East was spontaneous and there was an irresistible urge in you to do something for India. If that is so, then why was the formation of the I.N.A. in any sense dependent on the conditions in India ?

PREM: It is true that the fundamental reason for the formation of the I.N.A. was the urge to be free. But as I stated before, we were not certain of our plans of action. In those days we were groping in the dark and passionately looking for light. And this light came partly from the Resolution and partly from the happenings in India.

We had doubts whether the formation of the I.N.A. would be welcomed by India or condemned outright. The Congress had no idea of starting any movement before the passing of this Resolution. But when this resolution was passed we felt certain that the time had come to organise the forces of nationalism from outside.

We felt sure that our action would not be condemned as ill-timed.

SELF: Then shall I take it for granted that without the passing of the August Resolution, the Indian National Army could not have been formed?

PREM: Well, it is difficult for me to give a categorical answer to that question.

Chapter VIII

PREM'S REMINISCENCES OF NETAJI

On the afternoon of January 12, I again met Prem at his house. It was a glorious day. In the azure cloudless sky the silvery disc of the sun was shining with a full soft brilliance. After the grey, misty morning the sunshine was bracing. Every beam of light that fell on one's body was exhilerating.

For a few minutes I waited for Prem in the drawing room. When he took me out to his spacious lawn, I felt so cozy that I felt that I was sitting in a hot water tub luxuriantly sprinkled with bath salts. The mild sweet fragrance that imperceptibly drifted in the garden was soothing to the senses.

Prem thought I would start talking to him straight away as he had alloted me only half an hour. But I did not. I *could* not. The beauty of the sober and shy garden was so pleasing that I wanted to hold it in a tight embrace . . . an embrace that would defy time and bye-pass the hour of death . . .

I longed to merge myself in Nature's refreshing modesty. I wanted to lose my entire being into its inner depths where lies peace . . . comfort . . . and joy . . . the bliss of life and the ecstasies of soul.

But Prem disturbed my mental happiness by asking me to put the questions which I would like him to answer.

I opened my half-shut eyes and obeyed Prem's command.

II

SELF : Will you please tell me when you met Netaji first and what aspects of his life fascinated you ?

PREM : My first meeting with Netaji took place on July 2, 1943, when he arrived in Singapore. On that auspicious day I just received him at the aerodrome and escorted him to his bungalow. Three days later I met him again in my official capacity as Military Secretary in connection with the I. N. A. work.

The first thing that struck me was his infinite knowledge of military affairs. Frankly speaking, I never expected a civilian to have such mastery over the day-to-day working of the military machine.

For more than two hours we discussed the affairs of the I. N. A. and tentative plans to organise it on a wide and national basis. Like a seasoned expert he would probe into the minutest points arising out of our discussion. Unless and until Netaji was fully satisfied with the subject he would pursue it and like a fanatic thrash threadbare every aspect of the problem.

During the course of this conversation, a gentleman arrived to discuss some urgent civilian matter. With electric swiftness he switched on to the new subject. While I sat there I was simply amazed to find Netaji's astounding grip of that particular department.

The other thing that shone in the august personality of Netaji was the winsome courtesy that he extended to all and sundry. Although I had met him for the first time, his lovable manners made me feel at home. After a few minutes' stay, I almost believed that I had

known him for years. There was not a shadow of restraint or a trace of formality in his frank way of dealing with people.

On later occasions I found that Netaji was not especially kind and cordial to me alone, but every person who met him was shown the same consideration.

The third thing that struck me was his absolute faith in the final victory of India. Time and again he would say that he was not in the least concerned with which side won the war. The victory of India, he made abundantly clear, was in no way dependent on the issue of the war. He emphasised that it would be foolish not to take advantage of the prevailing favourable conditions to free India from foreign domination.

Netaji was so devoted to the cause of India that the freedom of his land was a passion with him. Whenever he spoke about India, he would become extremely sentimental. The language he used about India was like that of a man intensely in love with a woman who was being kept away from him for no rhyme or reason.

No amount of wealth, power or honour could make him deviate from his one-pointed zeal to break the shackles of India's slavery.

He was so much above the ordinary run of politicians that he detested power politics. The sole ambition that fired his enthusiasm was to free India. He never wasted a split second in thinking about which party would get power and who would rule the country. He believed in letting the masses decide what form of government they would like to have.

SELF: Could you describe the ceremony that was held when Netaji was sworn in as the head of the Provisional Government of Free India?

PREM: Well, that event is so ingrained in my memory that I do not think I shall ever forget it.

On October 21, 1943, at Singapore in Cathey Buildings, Netaji read out the proclamation of the formation of the Provisional Government of Free India. It was a solemn occasion and the whole atmosphere was surcharged with intense feelings. When Netaji started taking the oath of allegiance he just stood dumb and motionless. In spite of his best efforts to utter some words, he just could not. Instead of the words rushing from his mouth, tears started flowing from his eyes. For more than ten minutes a glistening stream of tears kept on flowing . . .

It was the most touching scene I ever saw in my life.

At last he controlled the storm of feeling that was raging in his mind and started speaking in low accents:

"I shall always remain a servant of India and look after the welfare of 38 crores of Indian brothers and sisters. That shall be my highest duty.

"Even after winning freedom, I will always be prepared to shed the last drop of my blood for the preservation of India's freedom."

I intently watched him when he was reading this oath. I could see that, though outwardly he was looking at the Indian representatives of East Asia, who

had gathered in Cathey Buildings, his mind was with the teeming millions of his land, for whose liberation he had unsheathed his sword.

There is another parallel occasion I would like to relate. On July 6, 1944, he broadcast a message to Mahatma Gandhi from the Rangoon Radio Station. In the studio Mr. Iyer, Minister of Propaganda, Lt.-Col. B. S. Rawat, Netaji's Adjutant, and myself were present. Netaji uttered every word so affectionately that it seemed as if a son was addressing his father. There was nothing else but love and humility in every syllable of his words.

And when he read the concluding part of the broadcast: "Father of our nation in this holy war for India's liberation, I ask for your blessings and good wishes," I could discern that his spirit had flown to India. The spirit was sitting at the angelic feet of the Mahatma and seeking his blessings.

SELF: Did the fact of Netaji's bachelorhood in any way influence his treatment of women and children?

PREM: You will be surprised to learn that he was the kindest man I ever came across towards women. Even though he was absorbed in the most urgent work, yet if a woman came to see him, he would immediately attend to her. Not only would he listen to all that she had to say, but would look after her comfort in the best brotherly way.

If the woman visitor had no conveyance to go back home, he would offer his own car to her. He would rather walk himself than see a woman going to her house on foot.

As regards children, I have yet to see a man more fond of them. Once we were going in a car and he saw three children playing in the adjacent fields. He stopped the car and started talking to them as if a father had met his sons after a long time.

In Rangoon once his car broke down. He was extremely upset as the work that we had to do was pressing and urgent. When the poor driver was repairing the engine, a few little boys and girls gathered around Netaji. He started playing with them.

The driver having set the engine right told Netaji that the car was ready. But Netaji kept on talking to the small lively children.

When he got into the car, he looked at his watch and said : "Oh, we are very late."

"But you spent such a long time fooling with children," I promptly replied.

"Well, do not mind. It was worth it," he laughingly said.

III

SELF : Could you tell me some incident of bravery displayed by the I.N.A. soldiers ?

PREM : Well, on every front the soldiers of the I.N.A. fought so heroically that their deeds will inspire many a generation to come. There are hundreds and hundreds of such stories and I feel at a loss to pick and choose.

SELF : Won't it be helpful if you concentrate on your regiment ?

PREM: On April 3, 1945, in the Legyi area one battalion of my regiment was surrounded by the whole of the 2nd British Division. In the evening I got the message that one British battalion had moved round my rear and occupied B. Echelon. I ordered the front line defences to be thinned. I could only collect two platoons and addressed my soldiers: "Look here, one battalion of the British army has occupied a strategic position and now our entire existence depends upon you. I cannot get any reinforcements at the moment and you are the only men I have and you have got to clear the position."

One of the men turned round and said to me: "Can't you believe us? We will defeat the enemy even if we are one to a hundred and twenty. Why can't you depend upon us?"

While this man spoke the rest of the soldiers kept nodding their heads in assent.

The members of my two platoons attacked the British battalion and through sheer courage and will-power drove the enemy out. The enemy battalion was fully entrenched and armed with the latest weapons while our soldiers were equipped with only rifles and light machine guns.

When my men attacked the enemy, they shouted *Delhi Chalo* and *Netaji Ki Jai*. The British battalion was taken by surprise, for it never expected such a furious attack from so small a number of men. Despite the fussilade of bullets ceaselessly coming from the enemy position, the Azad Hind soldiers resolutely maintained the intensity of the charge. The devil-like

determination of our men unnerved the enemy and they had no other choice but to quit that position.

I hope that is enough.

SELF: Please narrate one more incident and I promise I shall not harass you anymore.

PREM: In our army there was a terrible dearth of anti-tank weapons and we had to ask for volunteers for suicide squads. Every unit had a large number of such squads.

Often it was necessary to send our men with explosives tied round their waists to charge the enemy tanks. They were what we proudly called Human Torpedœs.

You will be surprised to learn that every time we asked for such volunteers, the number of men who offered themselves for this fatal job was much greater than we actually required.

In one particular instance at Popa Hill four persons were needed but fifty came forward. The Commander made the fifty volunteers fall into line and asked the first, twentieth and fortieth man to step forward. He decided to select the oldest man to fill the fourth vacancy.

While these four men were happiness personified, the remaining forty-six pulled long faces and openly declared that they felt jealous of the selected four.

IV

Dear reader, have you ever heard of jealousy and death going together? The word jealousy has bad associations. But in the above context it is the sublimation of manhood . . . the quintessence of bravery . . .

and the last word of patriotism . . .

Sitting in my room I try to visualise the faces of these men who carried death round their waists . . . who knew death was a sterner reality than life . . . *who for the honour of Mother India challenged the will of God in fixing the hour of their death.*

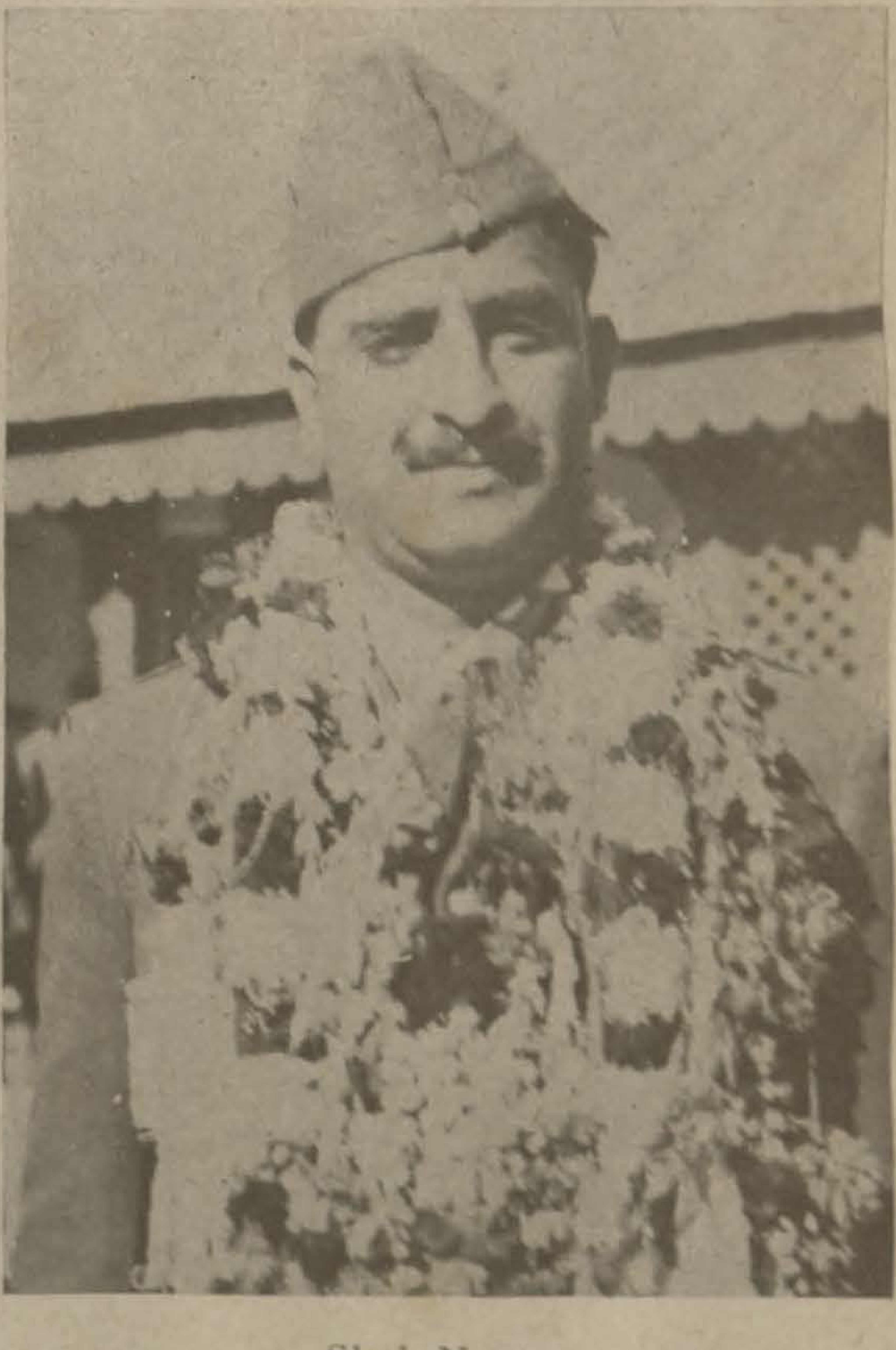
Full fifteen minutes have passed in my struggle to fix before my eyes the face of one such man. The picture that the brush of my imagination paints with the colours of my fancy is hazy, blurred and transitory.

Living among the members of the aristocracy and middle-class degenerate Hindus, the sensitivity of my mind has become so dull that it cannot picture the face of a man who would carry a torpedo and blow himself to pieces against the enemy tank.

I feel dizzy. I feel I am standing on the precipice of maddening disgust, below which the valley of desperation laughingly yawns.

I tremble with fear. I feel my legs shaking. I throw away my pen and dash to my bed-room and take shelter beneath my quilt . . . and do what? . . . What slaves do . . . sleep, sleep, and sl . . e . . ep . . and s . . . l . . . e . . . e . . . p.

JAI HIND



Shah Nawaz

Chapter IX

SHAH NAWAZ—A BORN PRINCE

During the lunch interval of Capt. Burahnudin's case on January 14, I met Shah Nawaz. As I walked with him along with my friend, Inder Dev Dua, to Mr. R. C. Soni's house where he was to have his lunch, I asked Shah Nawaz for an appointment. It took him more than five minutes to snatch half an hour for me from his whirlwind busy evening.

The first thing that struck me about Shah Nawaz was the immaculate dignified way he walks. His strides are small and steady and his gait straight and superfine. There is not a shadow of unnecessary quickness in his movements, nor any trace of restlessness in his limbs.

He is a born aristocrat of the purest type. The nobility that shines in him is so pleasing that one feels like looking at him *ad infinitum*.

By comparison, the type of bastard aristocrat that one comes across at a dinner party at a Lahore social gathering is revolting. The thing that infuriates me most in such clowns is that they try to transmute their class snobbery into some ludicrous kind of aristocracy when they converse with a high *white* official.

I would request these gibbering monkeys to compare themselves with the chastest nobility that softly glows in the dawn-like purity of Shah Nawaz's person. And they will realise that with their dress-suits on and their *chota pegs* daintily held in their hands they look life buffoons before a born prince.

The other thing that struck me about Shah Nawaz was that he possesses a well-bred voice. He clips his words with so much precision that one never feels the necessity of saying : "I beg your pardon."

He does not munch words as our spurious "high class" *Mahashas* do when they try to show off their "culture" at a mixed club before the charming wives of other members. In their mistaken zeal to parade their Oxford accent they in reality behave like a magician showing his tricks on the roadside.

Shah Nawaz's accent is a harmonious mixture of that of the Central Punjab and the Frontier Province. The scientific way in which the two modes of expression are blended is so attractive that in his speech one discerns the happy fusion of the two different and virile cultures.

The music that rings in his words betrays the miracle of human unification. Having his home on the border-line of two contiguous provinces, in himself he symbolises the unity of culture within his own personality.

Race over race, civilisation over civilisation, the molten tides of immigration must have flowed, tended to commingle and, finally inspired by the urge to unite and create, proudly expressed themselves into the glorious heritage of which Shah Nawaz is but an expression.

Man only begins by making his home. His home ends by remaking him. Amongst all the circumstances that go to create the heritage of a people, there is none so determining, so welding, so shaping in its influence as the factory of the land of which their children shall be native.

Spiritually, man is the son of God, but materially he is the nursling of the earth. Not without reason do we call ourselves children of the soil.

This unity induced by place is multiplied, as it were, by the potentialities of confluent and complex race elements. This mixed racial heritage, when duly subordinated to the unifying and nationalizing influence of place, is a source of strength and not of weakness.

In short, Shah Nawaz is the true product of the best qualities of the Frontier Province and the Punjab.

II

At 6 p.m. I met Shah Nawaz at Prem Seghal's house. The drawing-room was overcrowded. Frankly speaking, I felt jealous of the people present as I wanted to have Shah Nawaz all to myself for a quiet talk.

Men, women and children sitting in that room were so fascinated by Shah Nawaz's personality that it would have been mean on my part to snatch him away from them. They were so inspired by his conversation that every word he uttered transported them to the highest plane of patriotism . . . the region to which only those men of fearless hearts are admitted . . . the region to which men who regard the honour of their country more precious than their lives are allowed to get a glimpse of . . . the plane where the glorious Dead attain Eternity, Life and Freedom . . . the region where the gods tend to the needs of men who burn inch by inch the candle of their lives . . . the region where men like Jatinder Nath Das repose in peace and bliss . . .

III

As Shah Nawaz was leaving for Delhi the following

evening, I requested him to spend a few minutes with me. He asked me to come and sit in a corner with him.

SELF: When did you meet Netaji first?

SHAH NAWAZ: On July 2, 1943, I met him in Singapore at the aerodrome to which I had gone to receive him when he came from Germany. It was a formal meeting. He inspected the guard of honour and addressed us for a while.

SELF: When did you meet him next?

SHAH NAWAZ: In August, 1943, after the formation of the Provisional Government of Free India, when I was appointed a Minister. Later on, I was told by Netaji that Field Marshal Count Terauchi, the Commander-in-Chief of the Japanese forces in South-East Asia, had invited me for lunch. Netaji, Captain Lakshmi and myself went to Count Terauchi's bungalow.

Count Terauchi explained to Netaji that the Japanese forces were ready to march into India as soon as Netaji issued the order. The Count further told Netaji that the Japanese soldiers would do all the fighting to drive the British out of India. And after freeing India from British domination they would hand over the country, as a fully independent territory, to the Indians themselves. All that the Japanese, according to Count Terauchi, wanted was Netaji's personal co-operation.

But Netaji told the Count that any freedom of India secured through Japanese sacrifices was to him worse than slavery. Netaji made it clear that he would never co-operate with the Japanese army marching into India unless the Indian National Army formed the spearhead of the advance into India. He insisted that to uphold

the honour of India it was imperative that the first drop of blood to be shed on Indian soil should be that of a soldier of the Indian National Army.

Count Terauchi agreed to the proposal of Netaji and we thanked our host and came away.

Some time later, Netaji called me for a conference, at which he decided to select a body of picked and devoted soldiers of the I. N. A. who would be willing to sacrifice their lives for the freedom of India without the slight est hesitation.

Out of fifty thousand officers and men, Netaji selected three thousand and gave them the name of Subhas Brigade and appointed me Commander.

IV

At this stage a few young men came to see Shah Nawaz. Shah Nawaz fondly hugged each one of them, and started talking to them in the most informal and affectionate manner.

This lively group conversed about their school days. Every time a trifling incident of their mischievous escapades was related by one, the rest would burst into thundering laughter. The laughter was so spontaneous and infectious that at the moment I believed that I too was their class-fellow.

I knew that it was impossible for me to spend any more time alone with Shah Nawaz.

I went to Prem Sawhney, my dear old college friend, and sat near him. Though he is a dentist he is always keen to understand the trends and undercurrents of the political life of India. He wanted me to explain a few

ticklish problems. I did my very best. But my mind was absorbed in what Shah Nawaz was saying. My ears were itching to catch a "story" from the hero's lips.

Prem Sawhney felt irritated at my indifference. Twice he snubbed me and *threatened* he would torture me when I visited him again for a silver refill.

"So what ?" I mocked him.

"O yeah !" he glowered at me.

V

A fair skinned middle-aged woman came and sat on the sofa opposite Shah Nawaz. I could see that she had left her corner seat with the sole object of asking Shah Nawaz a few questions. For a few minutes she sat still. Outwardly she was quiet and motionless, but inside she was struggling to muster courage to open her lips.

She kept changing colour through sheer bashfulness. Then she gave an embarrassed cough and addressed Shah Nawaz in an affectionate, motherly tone :

"Please (the stress being on the word please) tell me, when you joined the Indian National Army did you hear a voice from your innerself which asked you to sacrifice your youth for the freedom of India ?"

After uttering these words, I saw that she felt greatly relieved and supremely happy. No wonder. When a hero like Shah Nawaz sits beside you, you cannot help feeling happy. And when you talk to him a mixed feeling grips you. You wonder whether what you are going to say is proper or not and what reaction it will have on the great man.

I was in the same predicament myself when I put my first question to Prem at the *Lorangs.*

Any way, let us hear what Shah Nawaz says.

He just smiled and with the utmost of courtesy, said . "Nothing of the kind happened."

But the lady was determined to know what miracle had revolutionised the outlook of Shah Nawaz. And when a woman makes up her mind to *do* a thing, I doubt if even God Almighty can dissuade her!

Immediately she said to Shah Nawaz: "Then, please tell me (this time the stress was on the word me) what made you risk you life for the freedom of India."

Shah Nawaz felt that there was no way out now. The lady was too eager and her affection irresistible. So he gave in and said:

"Perhaps you know very well that I come from one of the families in the Punjab most loyal to the British. Every male member of my family is in the army. I am a born soldier and I love fighting. You will be surprised to learn that in Singapore I and my regiment were the last to surrender to the Japanese. I was surrounded from the rear by the Japanese and I knew very well that I was fighting a losing battle. But still as a true soldier, as a faithful soldier, and above all as a man, I realised that it was my duty to die fighting. There is no greater joy for a soldier than to die in action.

"My Commander came to me and advised me to lay down arms. I appealed to him to let me and my

regiment continue the fight. But he argued with me and said that the number of the Japanese was overwhelming and they would soon mow down the whole regiment. And that if we resisted them and inflicted casualties on them, they would cruelly maltreat the men of my regiment.

"When I realized that my comrades in the regiment would be brutally treated, I succumbed to the advice of my Commander and laid down my arms.

"We were all taken prisoners of war. Our Commander before handing us over to the Japanese said: 'Henceforth you are under the command of the Japanese. Obey them as you have obeyed me, otherwise you will be punished.'

"Then the Japanese officer in command addressed us and said: 'You people are not prisoners of war in the sense that the British, American and Australian are. We want you to organise yourselves and wrest your lost freedom from the Britishers. We are prepared to help you in your great task and we will give you whatever help you need.'

"Capt. Mohan Singh was appointed the head of the army which was formed. I for one refused point blank to join the Indian National Army. My instinct told me that the Japanese were not sincere in what they were saying. These high-flaunting phrases about their sympathy towards India was just a stunt.

"At that time I firmly believed that the Japanese were merely exploiting us. They were exploiting us in the sense that they wanted to create public opinion

the sense that they wanted to create public opinion in India in their favour.

"Further we learnt that the Japanese had dispatched some Indian soldiers to fight in the Pacific Islands against the Allied Powers.

"If the I.N.A. was organised for the sole purpose of freeing India, I asked myself, 'Why have these Indian soldiers been sent to fight the war of Japan?'

"I felt convinced that the Japanese were not sincere and were just using us as a handle to further their own ends.

"When I was approached a second time to join the I.N.A., I refused again. And I told all other officers and soldiers of my regiment not to join the I.N.A.

"At that stage another thing weighed heavily on my mind. (With a smile on his face) You know I am not a politician. I am just a soldier. Now the question that worried me day and night was: What will be the reaction of the I. N. A. on the Indian people? When we would enter India will they welcome us or will they disapprove of our action?

"Well, I for one could not resolve my doubts and arrive at a definite conclusion as regards this ticklish problem. So I remained firm in my determination to keep myself aloof from the I.N.A.

"I was told by the officers in the I. N. A. that the Japanese wanted to break all opposition to the progress of the I.N.A, and so I was advised to join it.

"I had a talk with my officer friends and told them that I would go and join the I. N. A. to see things for

myself. And I further advised others not to join till I reported my experiences. Not one soldier of my regiment was to join.

"Immediately I found that my fears about the real intentions of the Japanese were true.

"In the earlier stages of the I. N. A. Capt. Mohan Singh, as I told you before, firmly believed in Japanese promises. But as time rolled on he was disillusioned and he protested.

"We had a little conference at Bangkok and decided among ourselves that we should sever our connection with the I. N. A. and disband it. We placed certain demands before the Japanese authorities and they brushed aside our requests.

"Then a conference of the I. N. A. was addressed by a high Japanese officer. He always wanted his will to prevail. He could stand no opposition, nor tolerate any dissentent whisper.

"Each one of us thought that anybody who raised his voice against him would not even be able to hear the echo of his own words.

"As he finished speaking, I spontaneously sprang up from my seat and started speaking.

"I spat words of fire at the Japanese speaker. I told him in plain straightforward words that if the Japanese were sincere in their desire to see India free they should declare it to the world and that they should immediately enter into a treaty to that effect with the I. N. A.

"I told him that the prevailing circumstances were

not congenial to the existence and development of the I. N. A. Further I made it perfectly clear that we were only prepared to fight under Subhas Chander Bose, who at that time was in Germany.

"I had never seen Bose before, but had heard a lot about his courage, intelligence and sacrifices. I thought that he was the one man in East Asia who could lead us.

"As I was speaking, my friends sitting next to me were pulling at my coat, asking me to sit down; otherwise at the slightest wink from this Japanese my head would be chopped off. But I was not afraid of death for I knew what I was saying was the voice of my conscience, and what man born of a woman could stifle it?

"When I had stopped speaking my friends were surprised to see me still alive. The Japanese officer got up and said:

"'I have heard hot words flung at my face by this young officer. I felt a bit unruffled first but as I listened to him, I found that he was speaking with utmost sincerity in his sentiments and that truth was on his side. India *needs* officers of this type.'

"You will be surprised to learn that he stood before me and bowed to me three times."

III

There were about twenty people present in the room. There was perfect silence. If a petal had dropped down the flower-vase it would have fallen with a bang. Each one of us was so much interested in Shah Nawaz's exploits that none dare even scratch his head.

As the audience listened to the story of the courage

of Shah Nawaz, a peculiar feeling of reverence breathed itself from their half-opened mouths. There was a perfume of awe in the atmosphere. All over the room was fragrance—the sweet fragrance of respect and love. Crouching in my seat I could *smell* it. I wanted to fill my lungs with the aroma that floated imperceptibly in the room. I wanted to fill my pockets with this life-giving atmospheric nectar and give it to . . . but to whom ?

" Then Netaji arrived. As I told you before I had never met him, never seen him. I knew he was a bold, independent man. But still grave doubts were lingering in my mind as to what his attitude would be towards the Japanese.

" So when I first met Bose, I started observing him as closely as a detective. I used to watch his movements, his gestures, with the same care and assiduity as a doctor in the laboratory looks through his microscope at the tiny plate on which rests a drop of blood.

" I watched him for days and days and days.

" To my supreme satisfaction, I found that there was no trace of servility and not a shadow of inferiority complex in a single gesture of his.

" He would never bow to a Japanese no matter how high a dignatory he might be. He was always calm and resolute. There was determination in the straight lines of his lips. There was sincerity sparkling in his eyes. And finally there was faith written in invisible letters in the furrows of his forehead.

" And what was that faith ? It was his faith that India would be free. It was his faith that Indians were

brave soldiers. It was his faith that from the Indians in the Far East he could raise an army which would shed their last drop of blood to free India. And finally it was his faith that a strong Indian National Army would march to this noble goal, without the help of any outside Power.

"When I saw all these things which I had been longing to see, instantaneously I decided to offer myself to Netaji—my body and my soul. I realised that there was no greater honour for an Indian than to march under the banner of a man like Netaji. And further that there was no loftier ideal in life than to rescue four hundred million from the iron heel of British Imperialism."

IV

As he finished this sentence, I looked around. I found the ladies trembling. I noticed them clenching their fists. And as I peered at their faces, I saw, enthusiasm blazoning in their eyes. They wanted to leave the cosy drawing-room and march under the command of Shah Nawaz. They wanted to jump into the arena without even wishing their husbands good-bye. They wanted to run to the Red Fort without hugging their children and putting them to bed. Each one of them thought for a minute that she was the Rani of Jhansi. Each one wanted to declare to Shah Nawaz that India had not produced one Capt. Lakshmi but that the whole lot of them were Capt. Lakshmis.

But mentally . . . mentally . . . . and that too for a minute or so.

Will my mothers and sisters present in that sacred room *actually* become Capt. Lakshamis? Will these

pious ladies lighten the burden of Shah Nawaz? Will these high society women of Lahore share the sorrows of Shah Nawaz in his march to the Red Fort? Will any one of them be the first to stand on the top storey of the Kutab Minar and proclaim to the birds chirping around them that India *is* free?

I will not comment. I wait, watch and see.

V

Let us leave these well-meaning ladies to the voice of *their* own conscience and hear what Shah Nawaz has to say:

"Now I will relate an incident which will gladden your hearts. After the formation of the Provisional National Government we were invited to attend a session of the Japanese Parliament. There General Tojo after congratulating Netaji on the formation of the Provisional Government said: 'When the Indian National Army frees India from the bondage of slavery, Netaji will form the Government and be its head.'

"You will be surprised to learn that when he heard these words about himself, he lost his temper. He stood up and thundered: 'General Tojo has no right to appoint me the Chief of the State. When India regains her freedom, it is for the masses of India to declare what form of Government they want and who should be at the head of the State. As far as I am concerned, I will say that Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Nehru and Malauna Azad are the fittest, the ablest and the truest persons to form the Government. I am but a servant of theirs. I am just doing from the Far East what they are doing in India.'

"When I heard these words, the faintest shadow of

doubt that Netaji could be dictated to by the Japanese or that he was fighting for power for *himself* disappeared from my mind.

"I had an infinite amount of respect for Netaji but when I heard him say, 'I am but a servant,' my love for him became indescribable.

"I said to myself: 'Here *is* a man who deserves our support.'

"Now let me tell you one thing which worried me for days. My father and mother died a long time ago. I had just one brother and I loved him more than my life. He was in the Indian army and I knew also that he was fighting on the Burma front. The question that troubled me was this: 'What would be my course of action if I fought him face to face? Should I aim my rifle at him and shoot him down? Should I thrust my sharp cruel bayonet in his belly when hand-to-hand fighting was going on? Should I kill my own brother . . . my real brother . . . my only brother . . . with my own hands?'

"As these questions demanded an immediate answer from me, I was caught in a grip of mental struggle. The very idea of killing my own brother would make me perspire. When the grisly sight of my bayonet fixed in his heart with my own hands fluttered in the air before me, my blood would leave my veins.

"For those few minutes I could not move. I would just sit like a waxen image, pale, white and lifeless.

"Then I would hear the voice of Netaji . . . the voice of four hundred millions . . . the Voice of Freedom . . . the Voice of Life.

"I would shake myself and muster courage to choose between the Voice of Life and the shriek of my own brother.

"I could not make up my mind. I saw no light. I kept on groping in the dark.

"Then the Voice of Life raised itself louder and louder. The Voice of Life kept on ringing into my ears.

"And at last . . . at last it became so deafening that it drowned the Groan of Death. I could only hear the Voice of Life. It was omnipresent and omnipotent. The Shriek of Death I could hear no longer.

When my brother opposed me in the field he was no longer my brother. He was just an impediment in the way of my march to freedom. And I said to myself: 'Whoever stands in my way shall die at my hands.'"

VI

The climax had come and I thought that Shah Nawaz would now relax. His nerves were strong; his emotions powerful. But he did not flag and started speaking:

"When Netaji came from Germany he told us that the Japanese had a very low opinion about Indians. He said that the Japanese thought that the Indian army in the Far East being a defeated army had become demoralized. And he addressed us thus:

"'Are these things which the Japanese were talking so flippantly true? Are there no soldiers who would fight with their lives on their palms? Are there no sons of India who would die in the battlefield to defend the honour of their Mother Land?

"'Let those who are willing to shed the last drop

of their blood raise their hands.' "

" And fifty thousand people raised one giant forest of hands.

" A few tears of affection rolled down his cheeks. The people kept their raised hands high above their shoulders, waiting to be chosen and file up in a line and march.

" The whole lot of them could not be enrolled because we had not the arrangements to train them. We had not the requisite number of rifles to arm them with.

" So Netaji selected just three thousand strong. He wanted to have picked soldiers. This first batch was named Subhas Brigade and I was appointed its Commander.

" This brigade was the first to go into action and was the last to surrender.

" We had no tanks and no air support. Our equipment was very inferior. But the way our soldiers fought will be written in letters of gold in the history of India. With the song of the Azad Hind Fauj on their lips, they would fly into the British army's camps.

" In the jungles of Burma the rations that were given us were inadequate. Just a handful of rice and a glass of water. But our soldiers did not know what physical hunger was. They suffered only the pangs of the hunger for freedom. And the food for this hunger lay in the Red Fort of Delhi.

" Hundreds of our soldiers were wounded on the battlefield. We had very few ambulances to bring them

back into front-line hospitals. They just lay there. They suffered and suffered. Their bleeding wounds remained undressed. The wounds became septic. And finally when they saw worms crawling through flesh they put the muzzle of their rifles under their chins. As the trembling finger pressed the trigger they shouted : Netaji . . . Net a a a . . ."

VII

Shah Nawaz did not utter the word "Netaji" in soft low tones. Unknowingly his voice had raised itself and his face was tilted as he shouted Netaji. The face of Netaji had arisen from the dust and planted itself before him. He looked at the face with set lips and tear-bedimmed eyes.

For a few seconds Shah Nawaz's head remained lifted and stationary and his wet eyes fixed themselves into space.

But, suddenly it dropped and his chin rested against his chest.

He was bowing before the dead. He was honouring his heroes. He was paying homage to those gallant sons of India whose golden names shall remain unknown . . . whose bones are littered in the jungles of Burma . . . whose flesh has long been eaten by vultures . . . whose families now live on the hunger line . . .

Now dear reader, please stop reading. Stand up and bow your head to these men.

The dusty particles of Mother Earth on which they breathed their last, every morning and evening sing their praise.

The birds that saw them dying collect flowers with their peaks and place them tenderly on their unbuilt tombs.

The trees which heard them shouting Netaji, whisper his name among their branches when the winds blow.

The distant hills caught the sound of the name of Netaji, and now, whenever they re-echo any new sound flung at them, they dominate it with the music of Netaji.

The endless skies above will not eat up this echo as they have eaten and are eating millions of echœs daily.

They breathe nectar into this echo and hurl it back to the hills to resound once again.

This process goes on and on.

The strongest of us will die and the richest of us will vanish into some unknown valley. In time to come our very names will be forgotten. We shall belong to the past . . . to the dead past . . .

But this echo of Netaji shall live for ever and a day. For it there this no past . . . no death. For it there is only the present . . . . and *life*.

Its present *is* its future. And its future *is* its present.